CYNARA

PHOTOPLAY TITLE OF

"AN IMPERFECT LOVER"

by

ROBERT GORE BROWNE

RONALD COLMAN

in the SAMUEL GOLDWYN PRODUCTION

UNITED ARTISTS PICTURE

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At thirty-five Jim Warlock was a prosperous barrister and happily married. His life was full, settled and almost perfect — then Doris came, and a gust of passion overturned it all, undermining all that had been so important in his life and turning his well planned existence into the path of tragedy.

Jim Warlock was not a bad man nor a weak one — he was simply not cruel enough to be a successful rake. And what of the two women, even more unforgettable than their "imperfect lover" — Clemency, his wife who understood; Doris, the little seamstress who became his mistress and sacrificed herself so completely? This is really their drama.

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United Artists Picture

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TO

CONTESSA EPHY LOVATELLI

For Her Voyage to the New World

"Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk: then you may hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and pride of man."

CARDINAL NEWMAN

PART I

"Oh! dis-moi vers quels
Mornes ou cruels
Désastres.

L'implacable enfant,
Preste et relevant
Ses jupes,
La rose au chapeau,
Conduit son troupeau
De dupes?"

PAUL VERLAINE

CHAPTER I

I

JIM WARLOCK felt in his pockets. Had he left his latchkey in the suit he wore yesterday—no parlour-maid had ever a dog's idea of valeting—or on the mantelpiece or even on his table at chambers? Clemency was right. Why didn't he carry his key in the same pocket every day, and every night lay it on the same corner of the dressing-table?

A square forefinger pushed a sunk brass button, and somewhere in the quiet house rang a distant and dispassionate bell. In his day—the heyday of the Regency—the corpulent dolphin that gleamed in the bright June sun had done the same job with much more dignity. Now only telegraph boys had the hardihood to trouble the cetacean's elderly leisure. In a week his view of the shallow, whitened steps, the broad, pallid pavement, and the shiny black road would be obscured by Clemency's inexorable routine and he would mutter something to himself about immutable laws of nature, as a striped curtain flapped in the doorway and mothered the fresh green paint.

How narrow, remembered Jim, had the tenets of nursemaids once seemed proscribing those sun-raised bubbles of paint, ripe for the sticky thumb of youth!

And with what unfailing irony did life wither desire when it became lawful, safeguarding the immaculate emerald of door and the streaky virginity of step from the indifferent finger and foot of middle age!

Not that middle age had been reached. Thirty-five was the prime of life. . . . Still he had attained the middle of the Psalmist's grudging allowance, and a man must be quick before the scale began to tip. Quick? What for? Already nothing lacked. A growing practice at the Bar, enough money, a jolly house . . .

A spot of water marked a brown circle at Warlock's feet. He looked up. The rolling, billowy clouds were too high, too luminous for rain. A row of silver drops edging the bottoms of the green window-boxes proclaimed that the new housemaid had been watering. Idiot, with the sun still up! Clemency said that window-boxes were Victorian. But why, retorted Jim, live in London if you don't have window-boxes? He had his way, and every summer fat, pink geraniums scrambled placidly over the sides of the boxes, like spinsters, said Clemency, surmounting stiles.

Behind the flowers the blinds were drawn, for Clemency liked cool, dark rooms and the sun would fade the delicate tints of rug and curtain. The window-frames stood out cream-coloured with last year's paint against the red brick façade, mellow with a century and a half of London's rain and soot. The narrow Georgian panes had the confidential look that no other period achieves.

A swish of pneumatic tires on the wood pavement signalled the approach of a highly polished motor-car. The subdued sound emphasised the silence of the empty Westminster street. The car slowed up. Suppose it disgorged one of Clemency's smart friends on the look-out for luncheon! Damn the woman! He had left his work to lunch at home on the anniversary of his wedding, and now . . . Thank God, the car had stopped next door! Nice-looking girl with rather a wicked eye.

Nine years ago to-day. Happy years too. The cold finger that apprehension had laid on his heart just about this hour nine years ago—he had never felt its touch again. The hand had lifted the moment he saw Clemency come up the aisle, cool and clear like rain.

"If my marriage turns out a mess," he had thought, "the mess will be my making." And he had wanted to pray that he might not fail her. His voice had almost stuck in his throat when they came to the responses, but Clemency's was sharp as silver. Nothing upset her. When the last trump went, he would feel her two fingers on the sleeve of his pyjamas, or whatever they bury you in, and hear her placid little stammer, "We must g-get up now, Jim." Less than a stammer she had. Now and again a word seemed to poise on her lips before it sped.

She had another trick. Her hand, going out to move a book, or pat a dog, or pick a flower, would linger for an instant on the act as if she listened in indecision or wonder for some sound only her ears

were fine enough to catch. That was how her hand had dwelt before it opened the box from Mallet that morning. Then came the little stammer, "J-jade, Jim, how did you guess!"

He hadn't forgotten a single one of the nine anniversaries. It was not hard to remember. The day that a bishop and a score of press photographers had made Clemency Draper and Jim Warlock one flesh had seen the running of the first race for the Oaks at Epsom after the European War. Noel Frater, the best man, had vowed they were mad to pick that day to marry.

"If it's a choice between St. George's, Hanover Square and the Grand Stand, Epsom," he had grumbled, "pew rents will slump."

"Don't be cynical!" Jim had retorted. "And isn't 'ladies' day' appropriate?"

What an age Onslow took to answer the door! She must be changing from her coloured morning things to her black and white kit. But there was her step at last, echoing on the chess-board flags of the hall.

II

Clemency was putting on her hat. A small black hat that she liked because it showed the amber shadows of her hair. Jim's knock arrested the nice settlement of tilt and angle.

"Jim!" she called.

"I'm early," he explained from the doorway.

"They settled that Rogers business out of court."

As he spoke his feet rustled through a snowdrift of tissue paper that hid the old rose of the carpet. He stopped and his eye travelled to a suitcase that stood open by the bed.

"Hullo!" he said. "Just pinning the note to the pillow?"

"And they t-talk about a woman's instinct!" she laughed back. Then her eyes clouded, "I hate going. To-day, too!"

"Go!" he repeated. "You can't go. Besides, I've taken seats for to-night."

"I guessed you would." She came close to him and crooked her arm over his shoulder. Her hands smelt cool of lavender water. "But I must. It's Gorla."

"Again?"

"So father says. He rang up at eleven. The wire is still hot."

She laughed, but Jim felt aggrieved. He had been looking forward to this evening. Not the show. That was at the Palladrome with a brace of Russian dancers who were being written up. Privately, he found one dancer much like another, and the girls' legs always too thick. But he had wanted this evening alone with Clemency. Too often he had to work, or people had to be asked to dinner, or some one was staying in the house. To-night, without a word said, they had kept clear of intruders. It might be sentimental, but a chap had the right to be sentimental on his wedding-day,

even if he took his wife for granted the rest of the year.

He looked up and saw her standing in front of the long glass, pinning a flower on her shoulder. It beat him how she always knew the right place. Her straight, slim back was towards him and her shoulder blades, for all her thirty years, showed through the thin grey stuff like the pathetically fragile bones of a child.

The flower was set and she smiled up at him in the glass, a smile that said she understood his disappointment and shared it. Gorla! Damn it! A good smacking was all she needed. Why did she choose his wedding-day for a crisis?

Clemency and he were to have dined alone at a restaurant, as they had dined before they were married. They might not have talked very much, but now and again a casual word would have struck a gleam from the prism of memory. Nine years leave a lot to remember—old men say that memory is the best part of life. Holidays abroad they had taken. A crystal summer in the Bay of Naples. The white winter sun on the snow at Mürren. People they had met, and liked or hated. Friends they had made and lost. Plans and hopes. Some had turned into reality, losing a bit of colour in the process. Others had kept their rainbow hues and had stayed—just hopes. In the background—and his mind tried to avoid the memory as a walker tries to spare a sore place on his foot—the grave of a child. They never talked of that, and

sometimes Jim wondered how often Clemency's thoughts were there.

She was opening a drawer in the cherry-wood dressing-table—what jolly woods they were using now for furniture!—to choose the right handkerchief. She shook out a grey spider's web of crêpe-de-chine or something and tucked it in the pocket of her jumper.

"Oh, well!" Jim grumbled at last. "She *is* your sister."

Clemency's stammer asserted itself.

"And your s-sister-in-law."

He nodded. As usual she was right. Gorla could not be allowed to make a fool of herself and a laughing-stock of the family. None of these young things seemed to think that their relatives minded any sort of scandal.

"When are you going?" he asked.

"Three something."

"I'll come to the station."

"But you hate seeing people off."

"That's all I'll see of you!"

She soothed him with a promise that she would soon be back. He sat down on the end of her bed and crossed his arms.

"You haven't told me what Gorla has done."

"Nothing yet. That is, she hadn't when father rang up." Clemency laughed and added, "But she's a quick mover."

"The devil she is!"

"Father took ten minutes on the telephone. The girl threatened to cut him off if he used that word again."

"Did he?"

"No, he varied it."

In its day Sir George Draper's vocabulary had been the pride of India. Even now that he had retired to Sussex to superintend the nuptials of pedigree pigs, he retained a certain directness of expression.

"Give me an expurgated version," persisted Jim.

Clemency smoothed out a pair of gloves, laid them carefully in her dressing-case and snapped the lock. In the distance the luncheon-gong thrummed sleepily.

"She says she's going to live with a man who does parachute stunts for the films," Clemency stated.

III

The Warlock dinner table was round. Jim sat on Clemency's right, his eyes on the dark reflection in the mahogany of crimson carnations. So long as Onslow circled the table or stood soberly by the sideboard, the subject of parachutes was shelved.

"I've talked to Mrs. Woods about your meals while I'm away," Clemency remarked.

"If she does anything half as good as this egg thing. . . ."

"Won't you ask some one to dinner to-night? You haven't seen Noel Frater for ages."

Jim did not seem in any hurry. He had heard though that the Sinclairs were back from Morocco.

"She is such a vamp," said Clemency. "But of course you'd ask him alone."

Jim agreed and helped himself as Onslow handed something sliced in a casserole.

"Can't say I like that affair!" Jim nodded inimically at a portrait of Clemency that the painter of the moment had achieved.

Clemency stood up for it. She was always sensitive about her possessions.

"But you haven't a green face, one eye and unequal ears!" Jim urged.

"I told him you said it wasn't like me," the sitter conceded.

"I bet he gnawed his palette."

Her laugh flattered.

"He said he wasn't a photographer. 'A portrait,' he told me, 'should be the rendering of the emotion a personality evokes.' "

"A nice married woman ought not to evoke that sort of emotion," retorted Jim.

Clemency looked up slyly.

"He asked me if it wasn't hell to be married to a low-brow."

"Damn his insolence. What did you say?"

"That it depended on the low-brow!"

Onslow refilled Jim's glass with cider.

"There's some sherry out," Clemency continued, "and if Archie Sinclair comes, you'll have a bottle of the Lanson, won't you?"

Jim said that he would see. An Englishman's cellar,

he believed, was his castle. The hand that rocked the cradle was liable to shake the decanter.

Her question stirred a memory.

"I have a confession to make," he said.

"That's why you were so affectionate!"

He pointed out that the anniversary must bear the blame for that. But did she remember Aitken?

"Do I not? You've lent him money again!"

Jim was outraged.

"I promised I wouldn't without telling you. No, I only ordered some wine. He has an agency or something."

"And he gets a commission. Only a man would pretend there was a difference."

"It was rather awkward. I didn't see how to say no."

"You never do," said Clemency, but she softened the reproach when Onslow had handed the biscuits and had withdrawn from sight and hearing. Jim patted the hand that had been laid on his.

"Aitken is such a decent fellow. When people are charming, I don't see how one can be stern with them."

"That's why they are charming," considered Clemency.

"I only ordered a few dozen," he excused himself, and changed the subject to Gorla. "Is she serious?"

"Young people always are."

"But a sort of acrobat chap!"

Clemency explained that Tristram Stone was not

quite that. He had served in the Air Force until he realised that Hollywood would pay a higher option on his neck than Adastral House. His wavy hair and his contempt of danger had arrested the passage of many a chocolate from box to lip.

"And she doesn't want to marry him?"

"She says she doesn't care."

"And the bird-man?"

"Says he won't."

"Damn his neck. Why?"

"Three good reasons. A wife and two infants."

Jim swore. This was Gorla's worst break. There had been a time when she had insisted on reading for the Bar. Her innocent advances had raised the hopes of a Hindoo student, cold-shouldered, she considered, by colour-blinded manhood. Jim got her out of that mess, but he would never forget it. Nor, he was ready to bet, would the Hindoo. Then with a school friend she had opened a hat shop in Knightsbridge. Plenty of hats were sold but few paid for. The venture ended when the bank refused to renew her overdraft and the school friend ran away with the Paris buyer.

"How did Gorla get to know what's-his-name?" asked Jim. "I don't suppose your father's house is overrun with parachutists."

"P-picked him up," Clemency answered. "Quite literally. A film company shooting 'The Price of Passion' on the downs. Tristram escaping by air from the mad baronet. Mid-Channel and Sir Jasper turns up in the cockpit of the aeroplane. He'd been

there all the time. Tristram takes to his parachute and lands—on the roof of one of father's s-sties."

"That will have started him well with the old man," put in Jim.

"It has. Gorla found Tristram keeping off the prize boar with a spanner. She rescued him and their two hearts have beat as one ever since."

"And now it's your job to rescue her? Can't your brother do anything?"

"Claud has gone racing this week. Nobody but a bookmaker will get in a word till the meeting is over."

A stranger, reflected Jim, reviewing the Draper family, would cast Clemency for the ivy. In fact, she was the oak. The vagaries of automatic dry feeders, the inconstancy of dancing partners, the fallibility of odds-on favourites were alike exposed for her sympathetic indignation. She would listen gravely, twisting on her finger an emerald that Jim had given her. Her comment, when it came, would be tentative—"I don't know, father. A solicitor. Jim says it's often cheaper to pay." Or, "I hardly know him, dear. He's been divorced twice, hasn't he?" For she knew that advice is more often taken when it is never given.

She was too well-dressed, Jim always said, to be taken for a clever woman. But that, he would add, was part of her cleverness.

"What line will you take?" he asked. "Buy Tristram off, appeal to his better feelings, carry Gorla abroad?"

Clemency played with her emerald. Abroad, she

said, was not a bad idea. But did Jim want her to be away so long?

Jim's reply would have taken longer if he had not heard Onslow at the door with the coffee.

IV

When Jim came back from Waterloo, the house was very quiet. Although he knew it sheltered at least three of Clemency's well-trained servants, its breath seemed suspended. Even the touch of life that tissue paper had given to the floor of her bedroom had vanished, and the desolation of dressing-table and wash-hand-stand proclaimed that the daily round was broken.

Once he had grumbled to Clemency that the way she organised his life was comparable with the Almighty's invention of the solar system. Regular meals moved in cycles like the planets. Dinner parties waxed and waned like the moon. A dance lit the horizon for a few days like a comet, or a race meeting flared by like a meteor. The opera, Ascot, Lord's and Cowes followed each other with the unoriginality of the four seasons. And the whole contrivance revolved round the sun of habit . . .

With Clemency away he felt as if the First Cause was missing.

It was too late to go back to Chambers and he wandered into the library, a darkish room where Clemency had indulged his male weakness for leather chairs and "places to put things." He lowered him-

self to a sofa and tried to submerge thought in the latest unit of the unvarying stream of detective stories she purveyed him. But neither the unfailing incapacity of the police, nor the superhuman cunning of the sleuth, nor the abysmal innocence of his confidant, nor the tireless virginity of the heroine had power to hold.

He dropped the book and let his thoughts turn back to his last sight of Clemency. Women were puzzling. Even the one he ought to know so well. The small upheaval of her departure to-day made him uncertain of omniscience. So little had happened in their married life that it was hard to picture what she would do in any but the usual circumstances. Their ways had been easy. And when Sarah had died, Clemency had been too ill to be visited. So he had missed the consummation of marriage that common suffering far more than any act of sex achieves.

She had been queer at the railway station. She stood beside him on the platform, saying little until the engine had squirted a jet of steam and shrill sound to the glass roof. His arm went out to help her into the blue-cushioned carriage, where he had found a corner seat. Her hand in its little wash-leather glove marked its moment of hesitation before it settled on his shoulder. Then unexpectedly she kissed him in front of porters, passengers and a pie-faced boy with a trolley of newspapers. Her mouth went to his ear—"You d-do love me? You're mine, aren't you?"

Of course, he loved her. She had known that these nine years. He didn't quite know what to answer.

"Say you do!" she had urged. But the guard's whistle blew and before he could obey she was sitting cool, detached, and upright in her corner.

CHAPTER II

I

ELECTRIC globes picked out in its frame the numeral seven and Jim leaned back in his stall to smother a yawn. Mrs. Wood's duckling and the Château Beychevelle's half-bottle had tided him over the first part of the entertainment. It began with a trick cyclist and Jim admitted that custom had not staled the infinite variety of his act. This indulgence he extended to the xylophonist who followed, and to the beams of colour that the limelight man played on his shirt-front. But the empress who stood in silhouette against a looped white velvet curtain to deliver a ballad about her dream king, and the flapper with a 'cello between her silken knees who held a mature profile to the light of a tall, pink-shaded lamp made him sigh for the days when music-hall artistes were vulgar as well as funny.

He glanced at the empty stall on his left. Clemency had told him to find some one to fill it, but he had fallen into the habit of leaving her to choose and invite his friends. Now he regretted his lack of enterprise, for if conversation was not legitimate with the curtain up, was there not always the bar?

The thought was soothing when number seven

dawned to the violins of the Spring Song and the frolicking of a couple of indeterminate sex, clad in imitation leopard and waving bunches of celluloid grapes.

He set his teeth and endured while the female of the species, as he judged her by the shorter hair, ran in circles with grapes held alternately to bosom and at arm's length. He fidgeted in his seat while her mate pursued, his playful bounds shaking dust from the boards. The circles narrowed, but at every turn with unfailing dexterity the satyr missed the nymph.

Everything, however, has an end, and at last, contact no longer avoidable, taking a deep breath of the sunburn powder his quarry gave off, the symbol of the life force caught her waist between his hands and lifted her with a slight effort above his head . . . But what he did with her then, Jim never knew.

II

To his surprise the bar was empty.

"Don't you like the dancers?" asked the girl behind the counter. The manicured fingers that were free from a peroxide shingle measured his quota of whisky.

"D'you call that dancing?" Jim retorted, and picked up the glass. Before he could drink, a hand had reached over his shoulder and stopped the tumbler midway to his mouth.

"My good man, you mustn't drink that!" boomed a resonant voice in his ear.

With an appeal to the Prince of Darkness, Jim turned on his heel and looked up into the face of a most remarkable old gentleman. A top-hat with curling brim crowned at a rake his crop of wiry white hair. An eyeglass without a cord magnified his lambent blue eye. A white carnation garnished the lapel of a tail coat whose long waist had been cut a score of years ago. Counting his heels and his hat, Jim guessed that the lean, upright old man must have covered some seven feet.

"I could not stand by," continued the patriarch in his beautiful bell-like voice "and watch a young man who thinks so soundly on the dance absorb the disastrous spirit the management call whisky."

The long fingers loosened Warlock's grip on his glass.

"Give that to Hebe to drink," the unknown commanded. "For while the years have brought women votes, they have not given them palates."

The barmaid tossed her head.

"It's very good whisky, I'm sure," she said. "We don't ever have any complaints."

Jim considered his mentor with a smile and asked what liquor he recommended.

"Two double brandies," was the reply. And, as the girl turned to the row of bottles, to indicate his detachment from the deal he added, "It's six shillings."

"You don't like this Russian style of dancing?" suggested Jim to keep the conversation alive.

"If you remembered Letty Lind who floated like a cork on quicksilver, or Kate Vaughan who could have set the feet of the damned a-tap on the pavements of hell——"

"Now then," interposed the barmaid. "No language here, please."

"—The dancing of the day," the old man continued, "would bring tears of blood to your eyes."

He half filled his glass with water as he shot the question, "How old are you?"

Jim smiled and told him. The barmaid sniffed indignation at such manners.

"Even youth," was the comment, "has its drawbacks. Why, you can hardly have known Geneé in her prime!"

Jim suggested that thirty-five was no longer youth. Sometimes he felt pretty old.

"I never do," said his strange friend. "My friends allege my sins have kept me young. What did you say was your name?"

The barmaid shrugged her shoulder and her lips formed the syllables of the word "potty." Jim wondered. The old gentleman's beautiful voice, his firm aquiline features and his supreme *insouciance* held a measure of charm.

"Jim Warlock."

The words seemed to strip a decade from the stranger's unbowed shoulders.

"Badger Warlock's son?" he demanded eagerly.

Jim asked if he had known his father. The old man's answer was indirect.

"Let me think. Let me think." He bent his head and took off the curly-brimmed hat as if to ease the process of thought. "Then your mother was Lady Clara Glen!"

"Rosemary," corrected her son. "Aunt Clara never married."

"That's right," agreed his new friend. "And Lady Lilith married twice. What happened to the Austrian? Killed in a railway smash in California? I always wondered if the stories were true about him. . . . It would be indiscreet to ask his half-nephew."

Jim answered with a smile that he knew little of the history of Rudolph von Kluth.

"They always said he had another wife," said the stranger. "Shut up in a *schloss* in Galicia, the tale ran. But people will say anything."

His eye was round and bright. Jim remembered seeing a heron watch the spot in the water where a fish had risen. He was unable to add to the hunter's knowledge of a scandal thirty years dead. The beaked features did not relax.

"And your father's place in Shropshire? There was a Hogarth in the library. I suppose that has gone to the States! What a pity!"

Jim was able to reassure him. In these days his elder brother had to be careful, but he managed to keep the place together.

"Fancy meeting Badger Warlock's son in the bar at the Palladrome," resumed the other. "You must have a drink with me. Tring is my name, John Tring. 'Dishonest John,' my enemies used to call me."

He rapped the counter with his glass. The barmaid turned reluctantly from the perusal of her marcel in the mirror.

"Two brandies," said Mr. Tring and added prudently, "single ones!"

With a familiarity that was flattering in so old a man, he linked his arm in Jim's and guided him to a table in the corner.

"Louis Quatorze," he remarked. "Not a bad imitation. But you haven't told me what you are doing here?"

Jim explained that he had sought the playgoer's shelter, despairing of the survival of the red-nosed school of comic.

"With the poet you asked," put in John Tring, "the heart-broken question, 'où sont les nez d'antan?' I sympathise. But what brings you here alone?"

Jim told him.

"That is no reason for solitude," he protested. "The contrary, I should have thought." He glanced quickly at his companion's face. "I remember an evening with your father at Pict's in Piccadilly. That was before everything was so damnably respectable. There used to be an upstairs room. . . ."

A pause followed while Dishonest John reviewed

his past, with satisfaction, if Jim could judge by the little curly smile that played on the well-shaped lips. Maliciously, the younger man supposed that the pace was hotter nowadays. Tring swallowed the bait.

"Not a bit," he vowed. "Not a bit. More mixed. That's all. In my time we kept women classified. Our wives and sisters. And the others. They didn't meet."

Jim picked up his glass and agreed that there was something in that.

"Everything!" asserted the old man with a wave of a lean hand. "It can be most uncomfortable. Last night, for instance. Lady Sandham insisted on taking me to 'Auntie's.' Beastly place, I think. Underground and so forth. There at the next table was her husband with Betty Blaze from 'Cash on Delivery!' "

"What happened?" asked Jim with his eye on a caryatid whose generous curves suggested a fashion that has disappeared.

"Frances tried to score. Asked one of the place's professional dancers to sit at our table. That finished me. 'My good woman,' I said, 'do you expect me to stand this for my share in a dressed crab and a bottle of sweet champagne?' "

"Very awkward," agreed Jim. "But even in your day men took women who weren't their wives to supper?"

"Of course we did!" was the impenitent reply. "Bill Wigram's motto used to be: 'Where I sup, I sleep' and every one knew that poor Mary never touched anything after dinner. But we were decent. We didn't let

our wives frequent the same places. Not that I was ever married, thank God!" he added piously.

"And marriages, people say, were happier than now!" Jim finished his brandy.

"Of course they were!" John Tring nodded his head emphatically. "The husbands didn't get so bored. Nor the wives. As Oscar may have said, 'Happy marriage is founded on mutual deception.' "

Jim laughed and rose from his chair.

"You're not going?" cried Tring, with dismay that had some pathos. Warlock pointed out that the bar would soon be shut.

"Who was the old fool who said that 'democracy points the way to liberty'? Cicero, was it? Sit down, my dear chap, for a little longer!"

It was evident that John Tring was used to having his own way. Jim was not surprised. It was difficult to dismiss lightly the wishes or opinions of a man with the face of an ancient Dane and the manners of the *Roi Soleil*. And it was interesting to hear a philosophy of living that had passed. He could listen without agreeing.

But soon the barmaid intervened. With the chant of "Closing time, gentlemen," she began to put out the lamps. Jim extended a hand.

"Good heavens, Warlock! You're not going home?" objected Tring.

His audience alleged letters to write.

"I never answer letters for six weeks. By then they

have answered themselves," was the elder's deplorable recipe. "And don't tell me that Badger Warlock's son is going to write letters on the first night of his grass-widowerhood! *O tempora! O mores!*"

Jim wondered how far the old man's protests were prompted by a perverse pleasure in mischief, and how far by a child's fear of being left alone in the dark. With a half prayer that when his own time came, his juniors might be as indulgent, he allowed the veteran to take his arm and lead him to the deserted promenade.

"Before the man Ingram started tampering with these places," said Tring regretfully, "you could be sure of finding half a dozen friends. But now the Empire is one with Babylon and Tyre."

Jim suggested a drink at his club.

"That would be very pleasant. But I almost promised to look in at a studio party on the Chelsea Embankment. Do you like studio parties?" he asked anxiously.

Warlock had to confess that they were virgin soil.

"Hardly the world I'd use," was the comment. "To tell you the truth I hate 'em. Hate all parties. But if you don't go, you don't hear anything. Might as well be dead already."

He went on to explain that as Maud Trinidad would be there he hoped to find the truth about her mother and young French.

"Or if not the truth," he added, "at least something amusin'."

III

On the far bank of the river a high oblong rose out of the mist. The night air was still and through the window Jim could hear the flow of the water. To-morrow, he knew, that building would show itself for a block of tenements, the steeple of some non-conformist conventicle or the chimney of a factory for sanitary ware. To-night it could pass for the citadel of windy Troy, or the tower that the men of Shinar built in brick, whose top was to reach to heaven. He was conscious that the proportion gin bore to orange juice in the three tumblers that a girl in Chinese pyjamas had poured for him played its part in this architectural phantasmagoria. But more potent than any juniper berry he judged the intoxicating inversion of values that ruled this newly-discovered stratum of society.

Dubiously he had followed Tring into a long, dark room where bare walls conflicted with an encumbered floor. He had heard a girl with a long chin shouting his guide's Christian name. He had wondered whether the khaki riding-breeches she affected were a hint that for a supper party in this strange world he should have worn his pink. If the vague kiss she dabbed on John's cheek had not suggested kinship, he would have liked to ask her history.

His scruples, he was to find, were exaggerated.

"Didn't know her from Eve," his mentor remarked, "with her hair that colour! Let me think,

what's the good lady's name? Just back from exploring the Congo, she says. Wears those pants to make people ask questions. They tell me she got no farther than a lover in a hotel at Marseilles."

Looking round the room crowded with individuals of three or four sexes talking, laughing and drinking, Jim suggested that he ought to say a word to his hostess.

"By all means, my dear chap!" was the airy reply. "*If* you can spot the lady. Last time I was here, every one said that Hubert was due for a change. A girl called Tulip had had the job a month."

"Host then!" insisted Jim.

His guide nodded his head in the direction of a deep sofa that filled the embrasure of a window. The globular Embankment lights shone through the glass. On a sofa sat a youngish man in a mustard and white check suit. The upper half of his face was spiritual—the tortured forehead and despairing eyes of a pierrot. His mouth and chin were undiluted animal—the Epicurean jowl of an Italian priest. He sat close wedged between two young girls. With their square-cut fringes and bright dabs of rouge they suggested the couple of dolls on the knees of a ventriloquist. Across his body they held a fervid argument on the impermanence of silk stockings and emphasised their points on his thighs with their forefingers.

"Is that Hubert Dubb, the painter?" asked Jim. "He looks like a reporter!"

"His friends say he paints like one!" Tring whispered, as they made their way to the window.

The artist did the honours of his house by laying a well-shaped hand over the mouth of each of the dolls.

"Shut up, you little cats!" he said. "And let the gentleman speak."

"I've brought Jim Warlock to the Small Cat House," was Mr. Tring's introduction.

"Does he buy pictures?" the painter asked quickly.

"Only good ones!" replied the old gentleman, who obviously believed in keeping art and artists in their place.

"Well, help yourselves to drinks." Hubert Dubbs declared the audience at an end by releasing the figures' mouths. Without drawing breath, they plunged into their argument at the point where they had been stopped.

Jim turned away and found that his sponsor's arm had been seized by a good-looking girl with a skin like a blond peach, close curly hair and a man's soft collar, tie, and coat. The conversation sounded intimate—he caught the words *"Fiancé . . . narrow-minded . . ."* So he made his way alone towards a deal table covered with bottles and plates of sandwiches. He passed groups talking of unfamiliar subjects—dealers, prices in America, values, royalties, agents—but every one seemed interested in what he or she was saying. He thought without much regret

of the perfunctory small talk at the parties he knew.

His path to the table was blocked by a couple whose intellectual needs demanded first satisfaction.

"Par-ssion," stated earnestly a young man like a successful slug, with curly black hair, big round spectacles and a belly like a bowler hat, "Par-ssion is the only thing that counts!"

His companion stared over his head with the detachment of an elderly vulture that has its mind on corpses. He was so thin that his body seemed empty of blood and his bones, Jim sensed, were hollow. Even so, their weight was too heavy for his knees to support without a sag. He raised an emaciated hand whose fingers curved backwards.

"Virility," he drawled, "comes first!"

Jim felt that to interrupt with a request to pass the whisky would be like brawling in St. Paul's. To his discomfort the disputants turned to him.

"Paris shall award the apple," promised the advocate of passion.

From what he remembered of mythology, Jim thought that on Mount Ida a more interesting field had gone to the gate.

"I'm not a judge," he protested.

"But the opinion of the man in the street," they urged.

"Well," he hazarded, uncomfortably inserting a finger between collar and neck, "doesn't it depend on the girl?"

"What girl?" asked the slug blankly.

"We were not talking of girls!" The vulture's thin voice held a note of loathing.

Jim hurried to apologise.

"We were debating," they intoned in unison, "which was the prime essential in a work of art——"

"Virility!" squeaked the vulture.

"Or par-ssion!" groaned the slug.

It was the lady in Chinese pyjamas who saved Jim's life.

"My husband," said her deep voice at his elbow, "says that drink is more essential than either!"

He turned and found a china jug and a tumbler placed in his hands. The ministrant had a shock of orange hair, a broad face with high cheek-bones and a straight, roughly-painted mouth.

"Temperance?" said Jim looking inside the jug. "I was thinking of whisky!"

"'Juice and gin," explained the girl. "It's better for you. I ought to know," she added sadly.

Jim liked her at once. Certainly, he said to himself, one got there quickly with these people.

"Come and sit on the sofa," she invited him, "where we can talk."

They took the place in the window that Hubert Dubbs and his dummies had vacated. Jim gathered that it was the custom to sit close to your partner.

"What are you doing here?" she asked him. "Isn't this a bit off your beat?"

He answered gallantly that he was very glad he had come. The result was unforeseen.

"Oh, do make love to me!" She took his hand. "No one has for ages!"

Jim wondered if she was pulling his leg.

"Won't your husband mind?" it seemed safe to ask.

"He's got what he likes best!" came the bitter reply.

Jim followed her eyes to a corner, where a tall man with the face of a fallen angel nodded over an upset glass.

Jim made the occasion of a drink the excuse to free his hand. He had yet to accustom himself to so easy an acceptance of the gifts and stints of life.

They discussed their neighbours. The fat advocate of passion, he learned, was a poet. The vulture was the foremost dramatic critic of the day. He had wrecked more plays, said the girl, than any two leading ladies together.

"Do you act?" he asked.

"When I get the chance."

Her province, he gathered, was musical comedy. Unfortunately, her voice was too good. No leading lady, selected for the shapeliness of her legs or the strength of her financial backing, would tolerate its competition. He had to hear a list of the parts she had played and the successes she had scored. But her voice was agreeable, and agreeable, Jim was bound to admit, the pressure of her body.

"Aren't you bored stiff," she said at last, "with all this theatre shop?"

"It's better," he confided, "than painting jargon. I hardly know a north light from a west window."

A man sat down at the grand piano. He was a Pole who after two or three days had regretted his impulse to grow a beard. Jim did not recognise the piece he played, but his neighbour told him it was Russian. He imagined then that he could hear the lapping of dark water and the sough of innumerable pines.

The end came with a discord and the pianist dropped his hands in his lap. He looked round the room and caught the eye of the girl at Jim's side. She nodded and without standing up began to sing. Jim wondered if she chose that Viennese waltz-song for him as a survivor of a pre-jazz age. Its words were in German, but the rhythm sang to him of sweet champagne and tziganes in tight tunics and the bare shoulders of unshingled women.

"Charming!" he said when the deep voice stopped.

She asked if he had understood the words. He shook his head and surprised a look of disappointment.

"French?" she asked.

"I learned it at Harrow," he replied doubtfully.

She leaned closer to him.

" 'L'homme a deux manières de sentir sa vie,' " she quoted. " 'Amitié et amour. Le reste est douleur et fumée.' "

Jim was saved from reply by a young man in a velvet coat on whose receding chin three carefully curled hairs upheld the hirsute tradition of palette and easel. With a red silk handkerchief brandished above his head, he announced a game of blind man's buff.

There was a dash for the centre of the room. Jim, who was feeling the pace his partner set, was not sorry to join. Once clear of the haven the window-seat afforded, he found himself sucked into a vortex of sociability where scraps of art talk, bawdy and gossip eddied over his distracted head. In the middle of the maelstrom a girl with painted lips and a Madonna forehead was binding the handkerchief over the weatherbeaten face and sodden brown eyes of a famous novelist. . . .

". . . Brushwork out of a housemaid's cupboard . . ." growled in Jim's ear a landscape painter through a beard like an Assyrian king's. ". . . Juliet, my dear, and she's forty-seven in August! . . ." he overheard a girl, who might have been a man dressed up, exclaim. ". . . Gene Tunney, oh divine! . . ." fluted a pink and white Ganymede with upturned eyes.

At last the knot of the bandage was tied and the babble thinned to girlish shrieks and more or less masculine whoops. Jim found his hands imprisoned in the moist clasp of a green-eyed flapper and an androgynous being with an eyeglass and an Eton crop. Giggling and galloping, they formed a ring to

dance wildly round the blindfold novelist. Jim had drunk enough in the course of the evening for excitement to have banished shyness. The blind man charged. The chain broke and Jim escaped by inches.

"Pretty nippy!" said the flapper, and pulled his handkerchief out of his coat to wipe her eyes, which were wet with laughing.

In the corner by the piano a girl with a bust like a Rubens Venus, and showing it nearly as freely, had been caught and soundly kissed by the Dickens of the twentieth century. Red handkerchief over eyes, she spun round the room as blind as her prototype's immortal child. Afterwards Jim swore that the flapper had deliberately kept him with his back to danger admiring the beads she wore. Certainly he never saw the rounded arm that was slipped over his neck. The androgyne gave a shrill laugh and began to powder its nose.

"You've got to guess!" said the flapper impartially.

The Flemish masterpiece ran a tentative hand over Jim's person.

"Boiled shirt and full-waiter," she diagnosed. Her fingers explored his face. "Clean shaven. No eyeglass. Not John Tring, but John Tring's friend."

A minute later Jim, blindfolded, was feeling his way round the room. Near the table with the drinks he had the chance, if his ears served him, to catch the slug. But he was out for more amusing game. In front of him he heard the pleasant contralto of his

orange-haired friend and he judged by her lingering footsteps that capture would not be unwelcome. Prudence urged him to be deaf as well as blind.

He whipped round and flung wide his arms. There was a flutter of skirts and his fingers closed on a slim wrist. A low laugh was followed by a silence. Somebody young, and odourless, and supple, struggled for an instant and then relaxed. He ran his hand up a bare arm and encountered a bracelet above an elbow. The flesh was very cool and young. He felt an impulse to exercise his right of capture. A voice which he recognised as Tring's stopped him. He did not want to provide the next fish for the heron's beak.

"Well," said the voice, "who is it?"

He let go the elbow he was holding and felt for a face. He found one on a level with his shirt front. The tips of his fingers met a little pointed chin, a wide mouth that smiled as it was touched and a nose that seemed up-tilted. As he withdrew his hand, long eyelashes brushed its back.

"Who is it?" repeated another voice.

Jim had a happy thought.

"The prettiest girl in the room!" he cried.

"However did you guess?" laughed the object of his description.

He took the bandage off his eyes and knew at once that he was not far wrong.

He was indignant that the rules of the game did not allow him to lead his capture to the seat in the

window, where, cooled by the river air, he could discover her name and all about her. He found some compensation in the task of binding the red silk on her dark eyes. Reluctant to let her out of his hands, he turned her round three times before he saw her slip away into the mob.

He stood against the wall and watched until she had caught the green-eyed flapper by her hair. He hesitated for a second before he crossed the room to ask if he could find her a drink. The moral qualm cost him the chance, for he arrived in time to see her carried off by the painter with a big black beard. As he drifted away, half glad in his heart that he had avoided danger, he heard the fur-fancier ask the girl if she was going back to Farmers' Green that night.

Reflecting that wherever Farmers' Green might be, it was well off his map, Jim Warlock helped himself to a solitary drink of orange juice and gin.

IV

Five minutes later he was walking with John Tring along the Embankment in the direction of home. The waning moon had risen and the mist was shivered into silver lace. The old man asked how he had liked the party.

Jim paused before he answered.

"They're an odd-looking crowd," was his verdict. "But they try to get the best out of existence."

Tring asked what he called the best.

"They enjoy life," said Jim. "And they work to add to Life's stock of enjoyable things. Most of the people I know are trying to add to their stock of money or pleasure."

"You talk like that," said Dishonest John, feeling in his pocket for a cigarette, "partly because artistic sets are strange to you, and partly because you have drunk too much gin."

Jim denied the indictment.

"For my part," continued the old man without noticing his interruption, "I never could see that the florist puts anything over the fishmonger. Both sell their stuff for what it will fetch."

Jim pondered this wisdom. He changed the subject.

"Who was that girl?" he demanded.

"Which?" asked Tring. "There were several."

"The one I caught at blind man's buff?"

"The little thing with her hair parted in the middle?"

Jim nodded.

"I've never seen her before. Pretty girl, but the dressmakers' shops are full of those."

Three o'clock boomed down the river. A late taxi crawled by. Jim decided to take it.

As he gave his address to the driver, he unwittingly released from his companion's tongue a flood of memories of dear, good fellows who had once lived in that neighbourhood. The list closed with a promise to look Jim up that afternoon.

"I'm at Chambers all day," said Warlock defensively.

"Surely not Saturday. And that reminds me . . ."

The old man broke off.

"Of what?" asked Jim with one foot on the step of the taxi.

"You are in a hurry now. Lunch with me tomorrow and I'll tell you."

"Well . . ." Jim felt unsuccessfully for an excuse.

"That's a bargain," said John Tring quickly. "One-thirty at ——." He mentioned a clubhouse in St. James's.

It was a club that catered exclusively to the tastes of unregenerate eld. In Victoria's day, elderly gentlemen had looked out of its windows as they criticised the Government and the ankles of the ladies on the pavements below. In George the Fifth's time, elderly gentlemen continued to look out of the windows and criticise the Government and the knees of the ladies below.

Jim knew that if he accepted the invitation, he would eat in an atmosphere that favoured the old man's code. But the luncheon would be excellent. Tring's voice was persuasive, and Jim's disuse of the word "no" chronic.

"One-thirty," he repeated.

V

The dolphin winked familiarly at Jim, busy with his latchkey.

"More like old times," he grunted. "I remember a dandy—rather like you he was—who tried to wrench me off my door about this time of night. Of course, I was too much for him. . . ."

At this point, without waiting to hear what else he had to say, Jim slammed the front door.

He was no more conscious of any comparison still life inside the house might urge. A tantalus that waited each evening to serve his needs shrank from the touch of the bohemian who could choose gin and orange juice. The saffron cover of the detective story paled at the idea of a reader preferring the carnal company of writers to their output, purged by chaste contact with the shelves of a circulating library. A crayon drawing of Clemency as a girl held itself to the light and challenged the unauthentic Rubenses and Bouchers that lately had taken his fancy. The eyes of the child looked through appearances with the clear vision of the woman, but he did not notice them.

Complacently he sat down at the writing table and chose a pen.

"Dear Clemency," he began. "The house seemed very empty without you. Mrs. Woods gave me an excellent dinner and I went to the show alone. It was rather rot. I met an old man who knew my father. A disreputable old bird, but I think you would like him."

Here Jim paused to wonder if she would.

"He took me to a party in Chelsea," he went on. "There were some very odd people, but it was rather fun."

He added some inquiries about her family's well-being, and stuck up the letter.

CHAPTER III

I

JIM lifted the lid of the old silver dish and glanced with a benevolent eye at a kidney recumbent in the crisp embrace of a curl of bacon on a marriage bed of toast. He transferred the couple to a plate that was almost too hot to carry to his place at the round table. Before opening the newspaper that lay at his right hand, he looked with pleasure through the open window at the pink geraniums and the sunny street. Then he took a long drink of coffee from a wide cup with a blue border. For the next ten minutes his attention was evenly divided between his breakfast and the news. He did not miss the company of Clemency, for it was her habit to eat toast and drink tea in bed, while her husband consumed a heavy meal in the dining-room.

At eight o'clock Onslow had brought him a letter from Sussex. The journey, he read, had been uneventful and fellow-passengers providentially dumb. Gorla had been waiting at the station and, as her car was a sporting two-seater, the luggage had been left to the mercies of the carrier. The pink lupins looked nice in the new border and the scent of the Mrs.

Sinkins pinks reached to the bedrooms. Had Jim found some one to go with him to the Palladrome? If an old print of a prize-fight came from a shop in the Charing Cross Road, it was his. She had forgotten to tell him that she had bought it for his library. She was his loving wife.

He wondered if the picture had come. He had wanted one of those prints a day they had spent together in Bath. How clever of Clemency to remember! Women had better memories than men.

Thinking of memory, he doubted that he would recognise half the people he had seen last night. Not that he had been tight. He felt too well this morning. He'd know the slug anywhere, and the girl with the orange hair and the girl he had caught by the wrist. He couldn't forget that face in a hurry or the feel of her arm . . . He wondered what Clemency would have made of the party. He couldn't imagine her playing blind man's buff. She would hate to get her dress torn like the Rubens girl.

It was rather like a dream. Not a bad one, but in this lucid June sunlight he was glad to be a hard-working barrister with a solid house in Westminster and a good wife in Sussex, and not a sculptor or a dramaturge dallying with a Muse in a pump-room on Parnassus. . . .

He didn't suppose that he would ever see any of that crowd again. You didn't re-meet the figures of a dream. John Tring, of course, he was lunching with him at one-thirty. But if he ever let the old man take

him out again, he suspected they would visit some new haunt. Was Tring a sort of disreputable Victorian Vergil, anxious to conduct him through the lower world of London? He might be rather a dangerous old gentleman.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck and reminded Jim that there was time for one more cup of coffee before he started for his Chambers.

II

For ordinary wear John Tring affected a hat, in his own day to elderly use as common as the horse, at the present day as rare. More lofty than the bowler, lowlier than the topper, it must have seemed to its long dead creator the golden mean, the μηδὲν ἄγαν of perfect art. But the sterility with which an inscrutable law of nature curses the hybrid did not spare this noble conception, and to-day only an occasional, long-lived survivor saves the species from extinction.

One such survivor, and of a fine golden-brown colour, was set at a careful angle on the white hairs of John Tring's long head as he sat in the hall of his club in St. James's. The hall, dignified with the gloom that only marble under English skies can attain, was the sole accommodation provided by the club for the friends of its members. It was only of recent date that revolt on the committee of wild men

had carried a rule permitting there the use of tobacco.

Jim was profiting by this latitude as he sat with the veteran over a glass of sherry.

"If claret is the queen," Tring was saying, "and burgundy the emperor of wines, sherry is certainly the philosopher; for it tolerates alike tobacco, transportation and consumption at any time of day without losing its temper or its subtlety."

"This is certainly a very good wine," said Jim unimaginatively.

"My second glass this morning," his host informed him. "The late Lord Salisbury made a rule to eat a slice of seed cake and to drink a glass of sherry at eleven every morning. To his example I believe I owe my good health. Have you prepared your speech?"

"Speech?" asked Jim, puzzled. "I don't speak out of working hours!"

The old man smiled indulgently.

"I've jotted down a few notes," he said.

He held out two half-sheets covered in a slender handwriting.

"Beneficent Example of Imperial Rome!" read Warlock in amazement. "Avoidable Excesses. Asses' Milk. Poppæa and Sarah Bernhardt. Smith and His Brides. David and Bathsheba. Miss Dorothy Logan. . . ."

"A few points that came into my head," John Tring said with modesty. "Would you like them explained?"

"They almost need it!" replied Jim sarcastically. "Unless one of us is a little mad!"

"Do you mean to say——?" his host began, and then broke off. "Did I forget to ask you last night?"

"You asked me to luncheon," said Jim. "That was all."

Tring laid a lean hand on his knee. The *timbre* of his voice sounded more beautiful than ever.

"My dear chap! You must accept my apologies. Or rather the excuses white hair must offer. Hope is so often the nearest an old man gets to performance that sometimes the two change faces."

Jim reluctantly assured him that he would be glad to do what he could.

The old gentleman's spirits rose.

"I knew you would, my dear chap! I knew Badger Warlock's son would help John Tring. Another glass of sherry while I tell you what we have on hand this afternoon."

Images of desperate adventure in hansom cabs, of the rescue of Beauty in a bustle from the Dragon terrific with frock coat and gardenia danced across Jim's resentful brain.

It appeared that Tring's brother, Lord Woolmouth, had unconsciously inherited in the opening days of the century a derelict farm on the North side of London. So ruinous was the homestead and so waterlogged the fields, that the property escaped

the attention of his lordship's creditors, whose numbers were maintained by the earl's interest in the game of baccarat.

"Years passed," said Tring, "and out of the womb of time sprang, fully staffed, the Ministry of Transport."

More years, and, anxious to give proof of its continued existence, the Ministry decided to build an arterial road. Slowly a wide strip of uneven concrete, dotted with petrol pumps, crept to the foot of the deserted Meadow Farm.

Tring paused to sip his sherry.

"This was the moment," he continued, "that confidence in the Onward March of Progress suggested to a man named Jiggs to buy up the fields that bordered the concrete curb."

Now, it is well known that Providence watches with especial care the tottering footsteps of the speculative builder and it is not surprising that the youngest Miss Jiggs should attract the favourable notice of one of the directors of the North London Suburban Railway.

"What then," asked John Tring, "could be more natural than that the rosy light of Hymen's torch should fall on a blue print depicting an extension of the line to the edge of the fields which the proud father-in-law was acquiring?"

Meanwhile the lawyers had traced the ownership of the derelict farm and Mr. Jiggs had written a

personal letter to Cadogan Square soliciting the favour of an interview.

John Tring pushed his curious hat to the back of his head. He might have been some relative of the Ancient Mariner holding his audience less by his glittering eye than by his melodious voice.

It was now, he gave Jim to understand, that Providence met its match in the Earl of Woolmouth. Except where cards combining to a total of nine were concerned, that nobleman was as astute, said his brother, as a bagful of monkeys. His immediate reaction to Mr. Jiggs' offer to buy the farm for an insignificant sum was to declare with a laugh that the place (whose name till then he had never heard) was worth double. Imprudently, Mr. Jiggs doubled his terms and confirmed his lordship's suspicion that something was "doing."

"To cut a long story short," said the brother of the fortunate and far-sighted peer, "Fred is now ground landlord of a large slice of the flourishing garden city known as Farmers' Green."

It took Jim an instant to remember where he had heard that name. Farmers' Green! Was not that the home of the girl he had caught by the wrist? His interest grew. Where, he asked, did Jim Warlock enter the story?

"We are coming to that, my dear chap," was the conciliatory answer, "by way of the General Election of 1924."

Unmistakably though the pendulum had then swung towards the right, the constituency which had hitherto inflicted the fortunately mute presence of Lord Woolmouth's heir on the Mother of Parliaments had revolted. Even the publication of the Red Letter had failed to counterbalance the report that Lord Drool had had to resign from all his clubs, including the Forty-Three.

"So next time," concluded the proud uncle, "Fred wants to plant Bertie on Farmers' Green and district."

Lord Woolmouth, it appeared, was determined that his son's merits as a legislator should be viewed in a favourable light. To that end he had passed the requirements of the garden city in review. Its simple wants seemed well provided. Tennis courts, hard and grass; golf courses, ladies' and gents'; public urinals, ladies' and gents'; places of worship, C. of E. and R.C.; no spiritual or temporal need seemed to have been forgotten.

"But Achilles," said John Tring, playing with his empty glass, "had his weak tendon. And Farmers' Green had no public bath. Since Fred discovered that, 'a small army of workmen,' to quote the prose of the *North Middlesex Herald,* 'has been employed at his lordship's cost to supplement the deficiency.' "

With hunger and impatience growing, Jim asked again where he came in.

"In the bath!" was the surprising reply. "It opens to-day!"

Jim suggested that if an initiatory display was wanted, he had better get Miss Gleitsche.

"Not a display," replied the old man. "Only a speech. The few words that dedicate the building to the deity of mixed bathing. Janus, perhaps, for he looked two ways. We expect a large crowd."

"You may," said Jim, his virtue reinforced by hatred of functions, "but they will wait in vain for me. What's wrong with your brother or nephew?"

Tring shook his white head. "Fred is busy at the baccarat tables of Le Touquet," he said, "and Bertie's stammer is too distressing. I promised to find some one suitable."

Jim retorted that he was not suitable. He knew nothing of bathing, politics or the Tring family.

The old man looked genuinely distressed.

"My dear chap," he sighed, "what shall I do if you fail me at the eleventh hour?"

Jim hesitated. It was difficult to take a meal off his friend and to refuse his request. Refusal was never Jim's strong suit. And surely his conscience was unnecessarily touchy. Even Faust could not have gone far wrong if his infernal guide had led him to a garden city to open a public bath. Should, by any coincidence, the blind man's buff girl come to the building, what harm would there be in a word with her, by way of relief from the civic horrors of the afternoon?

"Have it your own way," he yielded. "But I'll need a heavy meal."

Without further words the victorious strategist

led his victim to a dining-room that the Adams brothers had decorated.

"What about a lobster," he suggested, "for a beginning? And a bottle of Montrachet? Now tell me about Lady Malvers and the man at the American bar. What I heard was this . . ."

CHAPTER IV

I

THE public baths of Farmers' Green had the smell, illumination and echo peculiar to swimming baths.

"A very memorable occasion!" boomed the Reverend Wortlebury Dringer.

"Blah Riddle Ation," shouted walls distempered olive green to innumerable steel rafters.

"A great honour!" lied Jim Warlock, and *"Ray Rah"* sang the varnished partitions to the frosted skylights.

Their comments made conversation, however formal, impossible; and, but for the clatter of duckboard on marble under the boots of the inspecting procession, again peace reigned.

The green water rippled, and each ripple threw a slice of opaque luminosity at the glass roof like a boomerang. The smell of confined, decaying twilight seemed to deaden the footfall and movement of the party.

Jim guessed that the laws of refraction might make the illumination of a swimming bath, however newly built, unlike any ordinary daylight. That shimmer might irradiate the foothills of the moon

or the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. But the smell puzzled him. He had always supposed that the warm, bottled odour of a swimming bath was due to the incomplete cleanliness of the water. Here was a perfectly virgin bath and it smelt just the same. Clean water, he had always understood, was tasteless and odourless. But was that true of the sea or of big rivers? Might not water in bulk, like humanity, have a smell of its own?

He decided that he would not ask the gaunt parson with ears like a bat and a tuft of black hair at either nostril, whose creaking boots kept pace beside him. Nor did he hope that Tring's companion could tell him, president though she was of the local branches of the Woman's Anti-Gambling League, the British Ladies' Goat Society, the Woman's Guild for Prevention and Rescue Work in the West End of London, and the Woman's Association for the Spread of Theosophical Knowledge. She was a certain Mrs. Theodora Wiskin and the recent death of a second husband had loosed her cyclonic energy on the world at large. Opinion in Farmers' Green was in favour of a ballot among the adult population to refill the empty chair and confine her activity to narrower channels. As authority for so ruthless a measure were quoted the lots that are drawn by starving crews to decide who shall furnish the next day's dinner. A minority opposed the project as ineffectual on the plausible grounds that the wretch on whom the choice fell would inevitably lay prudent hands on his life. John Tring

white head now dominated the onlookers. Must, he intended to ask him, the cup be drunk to the dregs or could they slip away in Jim's car before the vote of thanks and the National Anthem?

But no man, say some, can escape his fate, and Destiny laid its hand, incarnate in the pudgy fingers of Mr. Boot, on Jim Warlock's shoulders. He looked round and saw the congested face of the Conservative agent peeping at him through the tendrils and convolutions of a silver-plated epergne.

"Beautiful piece, don't you think, Mr. Warlock?" breathed Boot reverently.

Jim tried to share his enthusiasm.

"I thought you'd like it. But you have a difficult job, Mr. Warlock, a difficult job!"

Jim went pale. Had he to auction this atrocity in aid of the local hospital? The agent suppressed a hiccup.

"We had a surplus," he explained, "when everything was paid up. A pound or two. Enough to hold a beauty competition. They always go well. The girls like 'em and the men like 'em too."

"Well?" asked Jim, weighing up the claims of Miss Moon and Mrs. Wiskin.

"We've held the eliminating heats. Those are the finalists." Boot jerked the epergne at the ex-deities who were ducking and splashing each other in the shallow end.

"A very nice-looking lot!" commented Jim.

"Mr. Tring said that you would do the judging

and award the palm. Meaning," the man explained, "this handsome silver trophy."

Jim gasped.

"Shall I tell them to line up?" went on the implacable Mr. Boot.

"Tell them to go to hell!" came to the tip of Jim's tongue. Then he caught the agent's bloodshot eye. The man had spent the morning at the Conservative Club drinking his patron's health. Could Jim extricate himself quietly? And after all, if he had not drawn the line at a speech in praise of Lord Drool, who was he to jib at judging suburban charms?

Mr. Boot seemed to entertain no doubts. Epergne in hand, he was busy clearing of spectators a space at the foot of the bath.

"Now then, ladies!" he called.

The splashing ceased, and only a high-pitched "Oh, Mr. Boot!" troubled the sudden hush.

Dripping, the twelve girls scrambled reluctantly up the white wooden steps and clustered in a self-conscious group on the damp marble. Moist hands plucked anxiously at bathing caps, extracting and adjusting locks of hair.

"I'm not going in front!" A dark girl with a mole on her shoulder bit her lips to redden them.

"My dear, I feel a perfect fright!" A plump blonde, who might have Austrian blood, was fidgeting with a kiss-curl.

"It's a shame!" went on the brunette. "They ought to have done it first."

"How can a girl look her best with water streaming down her legs?" The blonde's voice rose to a squeal.

A competitor who was trying to dry herself with a handkerchief, nodded.

"They might give us a mirror."

And then a chorus, "Oh, Mr. Boot! Can't we go and get dry?"

"Certainly not, ladies!" the agent answered, setting the trophy on a table that had been placed at Jim's right hand. "This is a beauty competition and not a lip-stick test. Mr. Warlock wants to find the prettiest girl in Farmers' Green, not the best made-up!"

Jim intervened with a promise that if the competitors would form into a row along the edge of the bath, he would not keep them wet and waiting for a moment longer than was necessary. He spoke with his eyes bent on his paper as he believed that his first glance would be the surest.

The moment of silence that followed his words was broken by whispered bickering as the aspirants for glory and the epergne manœuvred for the best place.

"Ready?" asked Jim.

No one answered and he raised his eyes. He found himself looking into the face of the girl he had hoped to see all afternoon.

CHAPTER V

I

THE girl's chin was sunk on her chest and she watched Jim under eyebrows that the delicate brush of a Chinese master might have traced. Enormous eyes were raised not in coquetry but in appeal. She dropped them to the epergne, on which she poured the ecstasy of St. Theresa in the Bernini statue at Rome. With an effort Jim remembered that a judge had to consider the claims of other competitors.

Next her stood the Austrian blonde, and by her side appeared like a pound of butter. There was a passable looker at the end of the row—a dark girl in a cherry-red suit. But she had knock-knees. He saw what Mrs. Wiskin meant when she said that mixed bathing made for better understanding. Nearer view of bathing dresses brought disillusionment. Those caps were hard on any woman, except, it had to be admitted, on the blind man's buff girl. And no woman, with the same reservation, looked her best wet.

He rose and walked down the row which smiled seductively as he passed. The pale girl at the far end in emerald green had a good figure . . .

He returned to his seat with a sigh. The old gibe that only facts can be more deceptive than figures was

true. He stole another glance at the girl from Chelsea. She was wearing a white cap from which escaped one delirious curl. Her sleeveless white vest, even when dry, could hardly have hidden the slender line of her body. Black shorts covered about half her thighs. For all her nudity, she did not strike Jim as a vamp. The sad eyes contradicted the impudence of the upturned nose. She combined in her little body two stories of the parentage of the human race—the monkey and the angel. She stood about five foot nothing.

Conscious of his inspection, she let her wide mouth curve into a smile that her anxiety made pathetic. But Jim frowned on the attempt to seduce her judge. An umpire she should have known to be above human weakness. To him entrants for a beauty competition mean no more than exhibits at a flower show. Aphrodite herself would rank emotionally with an entry of eggs or a gigantic vegetable marrow. Short, however, of disqualification on a charge of corrupt practices, he did not see how the child could escape the epergne. If a race-horse competes in the open class, how can a hack carry off the rosette?

From the murmurs behind him, he knew that the public had picked the same winner.

"Me for black and white!" he heard a boy in flannels remark.

"And you'll have to be quick!" rejoined his pal.

Jim beckoned to the agent.

"What is the name of the girl——?" The words

"in black and white" were checked on his lips by the sudden hush that fell on the crowd. If he uttered them he knew he would have the syllables *"Gah Blah-Wah"* hurled back at him by roof and walls. There seemed to be something indecent in this blaring of her soubriquet. Indecent and worse—irrevocable. He felt he would commit himself to a course whose end was not in sight. He changed the words on his lips.

"The name of the girl at the end of the row?" he demanded.

"Which?" asked Mr. Boot. Surprise made his husky voice almost shrill.

"The one with the knock-knees," Jim defined imprudently.

"Oh!" Relief mingled in the sigh with beer. "I thought you meant the prize for her!"

But already common sense and equity had won the day. How absurd and unfair to let an obscure misgiving cheat that scrap of a child of her well-earned reward!

"The girl at the end is second, and the girl in black and white is the winner!"

"Miss Doris Lea, the winner!" shouted Mr. Boot.

She turned to Jim. Gratitude struggled with excitement and allowed a smile that claimed him as a friend to part her lips. He felt rewarded for disregarding the warning voice. He smiled back and reached for the preposterous trophy.

His presentiment had vanished. As he stood hold-

ing the monstrosity with both hands, he wanted to laugh. The afternoon had begun and was ending in rich farce. The deaconess, his speech, Mr. Boot, Doris's epergne were ludicrous. But for Doris Lea, he knew, the afternoon would have few counterparts this side of paradise. He wondered if the shining eyes already saw her trophy stand proudly in the centre of the dinner-table she would one day share with some lucky counter-jumper. Her gaze never left its splendour as she accepted the tepid congratulations of her rivals. Her hand was pressed to her side to hold down a heart that beat too loud. She gave the curl a pat and took a step towards Jim. . . .

The marble where the girls had stood was wet. One foot slipped under her and she tumbled in a heap of damp stockinet and pink flesh at his feet. The unsuccessful candidates tittered.

Jim held out his free hand to help. She took it but did not try to rise. The crowd drew sympathetically round.

"Ooh!" said Doris Lea.

Jim asked if she was hurt. She nodded and Jim saw the tip of a red tongue pressed between her teeth.

"It's my ankle," she explained. "It always was weak."

Her voice was neither educated nor affected.

Jim suggested that he had better help her to his chair.

"I daresay it'll be all right in a minute," she hoped.

He bent down and lifted her. The epergne in his

right hand compelled him to pass his arm round her warm, damp waist. It did not occur to him to wonder if he was wetting the sleeve of his coat. He helped her—she weighed nothing—to hop to the chair. Somebody draped a towel over her shoulders.

"Where shall I put this?" He pointed to her prize.

"Oh, may I hold it?" she smiled up into his face.

That moment the Reverend Wortlebury Dringer chose to move the vote of thanks. As his parishioners knew to their cost, about twenty-five minutes was his best distance. So for that space Jim was tied to Doris's side. The position may have made Mr. Dringer's eloquence more endurable than Mrs. Wiskin's.

Doris caught Jim's eye and made a face as the nasal voice came echoing down the bath. She whispered that parsons gave her the creeps. After that protest she let the periods roll over her restless head until they ground out a reference to Jim's speech.

"It was lovely," she whispered. "I do think you're clever."

Jim looked quickly at her. She seemed to mean what she said. And, after all, she liked epergnes!

There came a time when Mr. Dringer could no longer postpone putting the motion to the vote of such part of his audience as had not been near a door. The moment the hands were lowered, Miss Milligan, as if she feared a relapse into eloquence, stepped smartly on the pedals of the harmonium that had been imported from the school. There is nothing,

except death, as final as the National Anthem played on a harmonium.

"That," thought Jim, "puts a full stop to the afternoon."

II

He waved to John Tring, who in his tireless old age was forming the nucleus of a chattering cluster of discomfited competitors. The veteran seemed in no hurry to escape.

"How will you get home?" The question was only civil.

"Oh, well!" Miss Lea laughed. "Hop, I suppose."

"How far?"

"Five miles!"

She explained that she had moved from Farmers' Green to Edgware after a row with her landlady.

"You know what they are," she confided.

"Does Mr. Boot understand that you don't live here now?" He made his voice grave.

Her face clouded and she hugged her prize.

"But I did," she assured him. "Must I tell him?"

"We'll risk it," said Jim, whose high principles were on the slide. "You didn't walk from Edgware?"

She told him that she had ridden on her friend's bicycle. She hadn't a bicycle herself. Rotten things, they made you so hot.

It was clear to Jim that she could not ride back with a twisted ankle.

The prospect did not seem to trouble her. She

supposed she would get back somehow. A boy she knew had a motor bike. If she could get hold of him, he would take her on his pillion.

"Carrying that?" Jim nodded at the epergne. He made up his mind. "I have a car here. We can drop you."

Cutting short her thanks—why should she thank him for an act of ordinary humanity?—he shouted across the bath to John Tring that it was time to go. Reluctantly the old man detached himself.

"Those girls have been complaining that they were taken straight from the bath to the judgment seat. But," he turned to Doris with a bow, "I can see that wet or dry they never had a chance!"

"Just tell *them* that," said Doris.

John Tring adjusted his eyeglass.

"I've seen you somewhere before," he announced.

"At Hubert Dubbs's studio," Jim explained quickly. "Miss Lea has hurt her ankle. I said we would give her a lift."

"Of course, my dear chap, of course! Anything else would be inhumane!" Was there a sarcastic note in the beautiful voice? "But the *corvée* will be yours. I promised to look at Miss Trix's water-colours."

Jim was at a loss. He had not planned to drive about the country alone with the winner of the Farmers' Green Beauty Competition. But under the girl's nose he could not beg Tring for his chaperonage

—even without a firm suspicion that the old man's love of mischief would keep him resolutely absent.

"I will take this," said John Tring, and grasped the trophy, "while you carry Miss Lea to her dressing-room."

Jim looked into the twinkling eye and back to the girl.

"Put your hand on my shoulder," he told her sternly, "and hop!"

III

"Funny seeing you at Farmers' Green," said Miss Lea, settling herself into the front seat of the saloon and pulling her coat together to hide a worn green frock.

Jim pressed the knob of the self-starter.

"If it comes to that," he retorted, "it was funny seeing you in Chelsea."

"Wasn't it a scream? Olive took me."

Jim asked who Olive was.

"Olive Day. She works as a model. Only for her face," she assured him modestly. And then, for truth must out, "Not that she'd mind the whole thing if she wasn't too fat!"

"Did you like the party?"

Doris turned the dashboard lamp on and off again.

"Oh, well!" she said non-committally.

"I thought it was rather fun," he owned.

Doris yielded to a burst of confidence.

"There weren't any nice boys!" And then, fearing she might have hurt his feelings, "I don't mean you. All the ones with funny clothes."

"They do spoil a party," he assented.

"Oh, well!" she said again and looked up at him. "You didn't stay long."

He asked about her. She shook her head.

"A gentleman tried to get fresh with me after you'd gone," she stated.

"You didn't like that?"

"Oh, no!" And as an afterthought, "He had a beard."

"So you left?"

"Is that the foot brake or the clutch?" she asked. When he had told her, "Well, I couldn't exactly. You see Olive had got off with a boy. In the motor trade he was. But he was learning to paint. At the . . . some school or other."

"Slade School?" was Jim's suggestion.

"That was it. You see I was sleeping at Olive's place, so I couldn't go till she was ready, could I?"

"And the gentleman with a beard got fresher?"

"Oh, no! A person doesn't get fresh with me twice!"

There was a pause while Jim swung round a dust cart and overtook a motor bus.

"You do drive well," she commended him. Then without drawing breath, "Will you teach me to drive?"

"I don't have much time," it seemed best to say.

"Are you in business?" And then remembering that ladies are not curious, "I know a girl who has a car."

Her companion professed interest.

"Yes, it's a Morris. She used to work where I do. Then she married a customer."

Jim asked if the marriage was a success.

"Oh, yes! He's a very good husband. He had to divorce his wife to marry her."

She leaned towards him to brush some dust from his elbow. He covered the pleasure the touch of her fingers gave by asking her where she worked.

"At Madame Ducette's," she answered, as one might say, "At the Foreign Office."

He had to admit that he was no wiser. Doris was amused.

"Why, it's in Shaftesbury Avenue!"

Her fingers were busy with the curl that just showed at the side of her pull-on hat.

"Aren't you ever in the West End?"

Jim explained that his work kept him in the Law Courts.

"I knew a boy who was had up in the Law Courts," she said proudly. "At least, I didn't exactly know him, but he used to take a girl friend of mine to the Wimbledon Palais."

"What had he done?"

"Gwen wouldn't tell me. She said he was more sinned against than sinning."

This was brought out as a sentiment of great beauty. She wriggled herself deeper into her seat and fingered the leather.

"This is a lovely car. Is it your own?"

Jim nodded.

"You must make a lot of money at the Law Courts. I don't wonder. You speak so well!"

Her eyes were eager with admiration and she quoted some of the worst-worn *clichés* of his eloquence.

"I did laugh at the story about the Chinaman." She smiled at the recollection, and even the most modest are vulnerable to praise of their stories.

"Do you always drive your car yourself?" she ran on.

"My wife does sometimes," said Jim firmly.

"Ooh! Are you married?"

This was clearly a blow. Jim guessed that the girl who married the customer was a favourite model. Philosophy came to her aid.

"They say all the nice men are married!"

Jim asked if she was engaged. She pulled her coat over her knees and shook her head without speaking. Jim feared that he had probed a hidden wound.

"I used to have a *fiancé*," she confided, "but I gave him the bird."

Jim tried to find words of sympathy.

"I think meanness is dreadful," she went on. "Don't you?"

Her confidant agreed with his eyes gravely on the road.

"Would you believe it, when he took me to the Pictures he wanted me to buy the chocolates!"

Jim gasped.

"So I'm going to be careful next time. Do you like being married?"

"Yes!" said Jim. "I'm very fond of my wife."

"Ooh!" This was another blow. "Milly knows a married man. He tells her his wife doesn't understand him. She says all married men pitch that stuff. Sometimes, she says, it's because their wives are cold."

A car overtook them.

"I wish I had a Chrysler. Aren't they lovely?" Her words followed her thoughts. "I wouldn't like to be married. Fancy having to tell somebody what you'd been doing!"

"Don't you have to tell your mother?" he asked. But he subdued his smile on learning that her mother had died when Doris was sixteen.

"I haven't a father either," she said pathetically. She rejected the phrase of sympathy that Jim was about to produce with the comment on her misfortune, "Sob stuff!"

A lorry blocked the road and Jim had to change down.

"Don't you change gear quietly!" she observed. "Lilly Davies nearly sends me deaf!"

She considered him with her head on one side.

"I should say you were good at all sorts of things."

Jim made noises of disclaimer.

"Oh yes, I can always tell!"

He guided the talk back to her family.

"I used to live with Auntie Maud," she told him, "but she was always wanting to know where I went. And I had to pay her seven shillings a week, so I might just as well have rooms of my own. That's the way I looked at it."

Jim asked if she were not lonely. She darted a look at him as if to gauge his meaning. She decided that it was on the surface.

"Oh, no!" she assured him. "You see I'm not often in. And I live with my girl friend."

She went on to tell him of the flat they had rented at Edgware, what they paid for it and what she earned.

"You see, that doesn't leave me much for myself. Only I do think it's nice to be on your own, don't you? And landladies are so nosey, aren't they? I'm sure Mrs. Hook used to open my letters."

And so their talk ran on. Jim frankly enjoyed the drive. The girl's uncompromising admiration was flattering; so was her happiness in his company. He could not seem so very middle aged. It might be true that if some more than usually rapacious Chancellor were to bring in a brain-power tax, Doris would contribute little to the Excise. But her voice was pretty and he had never heard that specialists like Mr. Wordsworth complained of the subjects chosen by

brooks or mountain springs. Examined, the talk of his friends did not score many higher marks. The different ways of killing the smaller mammals, birds and fish; the unvarying entertainment foisted on the public by impresario and publisher; the ineptitudes of six hundred and fifteen legislators at four hundred pounds a year: such topics were only a little more interesting than Auntie Maud's temper and Lilly Davies's Morris car.

"This is Edgware, isn't it?" he had to ask at length.

She nodded.

"You turn by the station." She pulled her hat lower over her eyes. "What a pity we're there so soon!"

And Jim had to suppress a similar regret.

IV

But he had not meant to follow her into No. 7 Gresham Mansions. He had brought his car to a standstill at the door of the terra-cotta faced pile and had given her a hand out of the deep seat. As she stepped to the pavement, she winced.

"Ooh!" she cried. "My foot!"

"Can you manage?" he asked, hardening his heart.

"Oh, yes!" she declared. She turned sad eyes towards him. "I do think it was good of you to bring me all this way. Very few gentlemen would have done it."

She held out a hot little hand. He imagined a twist

of disappointment on the wide mouth when he dropped it and let her limp alone across the strip of pavement and out of sight through the ugly doorway. He stood for a moment, hearing her footfall grow fainter on the stone staircase. Then he climbed into his car and reëntered (he told himself) his middle age. Senseless barriers of class made it unlikely that he would see Doris Lea again. As the car gathered way, he gave what was meant to be a last glance over his shoulder. His foot came off the accelerator, for there on the floor of the saloon, as many-branched as the candlesticks of the Temple of Jerusalem, stood the blessed epergne!

"Hi!" he called. "Miss Lea!"

There was no answer. He stopped the car. How on earth had she come to forget the thing? At first she could not bear to let its luxuriance out of her hands. In his male innocence he blamed the mutability of women. But for all his disapproval, there was no frown on his face as he backed the car and shouldered his way through the swing door of the mansions.

There seemed to be no board in the narrow hall to tell him the number of her flat. At a guess he should try the top of the building.

He took the dark stairs three at a time. On the top landing two doors, with an imitation oak grain, faced each other. Jim hesitated to knock and inquire. He did not want to give the block of flats such a fruitful subject for gossip as the motives of the tall

gentleman who came in a saloon car to see Miss Lea. As he wondered if he had not better incur the labour of sending the unwieldy ornament by post, the right-hand door opened. A girl with untidy red hair and a moderately clean blue jumper looked out. One hand held a battered saucepan whose lid emitted steam, the other felt for the bottle of milk that stood on the mat. Her green eyes were fixed on the stranger. Acutely conscious of his burden—would the story go round that the tall gentleman attempted Miss Lea's virtue with an epergne?—Jim took off his hat and put his question.

"Doris Lea?" asked the girl coldly. "She lives here."

"Then I know you," said Jim with a smile. "You are Milly!"

"I'm Miss Miles," was the crushing retort.

"Sorry!" said Jim.

"Granted!" said Miss Miles.

Finding the conversation a little too brisk for him, Jim asked the red-haired girl to give his charge to her friend.

"What is it?" she asked suspiciously.

"Hers. She won the prize."

"Judge must have had one eye!" was Miss Miles's surmise.

"He hadn't," snapped Jim. "I've remarkably good sight."

Milly did not seem to think an apology was necessary.

"Well, why did you bring this thing round here any way?" she retorted.

Jim sighed. Explanation would take all day. He asked his tormentor again if she would not relieve him of his burden.

"Can't you see my hands are full?" she asked. "Can't you take it in yourself?"

Jim hesitated.

"Unless you're too good for a business girl's flat," she gibed.

Jim capitulated. The green-eyed girl had made a study of the art of putting men in the wrong.

" 'Be it never so 'umble,' " she quoted as her slippered foot hooked the thin door behind them.

"Not in there!" she cried. "That's my bedroom. The idea!"

She elbowed him into the sitting-room and ordered him to take a basket chair, while she finished making the tea.

"Unless you only drink champagne!" was the dart she planted as she closed the door behind her.

Before Jim had time to examine his surroundings —the fringed mantelboard thick with photographs of "boys," the bamboo table and the coloured glass vase stuck with a handful of wilting sweet peas—a second door half-hidden by a green serge curtain opened.

"You!" said Doris Lea.

There was no doubt that she was glad to see him. She wriggled with delight like a spaniel.

"I never heard you!" she said. "I was taking off my things."

The pull-on hat and the long coat had been discarded. A shabby green silk frock played about her knees. Her black hair, parted so severely in the middle, relaxed at its ends into the frivolity of curls.

"You forgot your prize," Jim reminded her and set the prize beside the peas.

"Oh that!" she said without a glance.

"How could you forget it!" Jim was talking to drive away an unexplained shyness that had attacked him.

"I was thinking of something else," she said and the blood streamed to her pale cheeks.

They were silent, for there was more than could ever be said. At the studio, when blindfolded he had caught her, his fingers had touched her wrist, her shoulder, her face. At the baths he had seen her three-parts naked. But now this sight of her in her shabby indoor frock and her oldest shoes, among her pathetic possessions, engendered a new intimacy. No longer was the relation between them the one of blind man and captive, judge and exhibit, barrister and shopgirl. They had become close friends. He wanted to take her hand to cement the friendship. No, that was not true. He wanted to feel that slim, weak wrist gripped in his palm. . . .

He drove the longing out of his heart and fumbled for some commonplace to break the silence. Doris did not help him. The blush had died out of her face.

She seemed content to be silent for ever. A hundred years—or seconds—passed before, with a bang and a rattle, Milly carried in a tray.

"Hope I don't intrude!" she remarked. "But I happen to want my food!"

She broke the spell of silence. Jim looked at his watch and declined to stay to tea.

"Oh, you must!" cried Doris. "That's too bad."

"Leave him alone," put in Milly. "Don't you know there's a cocktail party at Buckingham Palace?"

Jim was firm. He wanted to stay, he said, but an engagement made that impossible.

The engagement he had remembered had been made nine years and a day ago at St. George's Church in Hanover Square.

CHAPTER VI

I

On Monday night, when Jim came back from work, he found a telegram on the hall table. As he stooped, his eye fell on a stumpy green parasol with a green stone in the handle that lay across a Chippendale chair.

"Clemency!" he called.

"Here, in the d-drawing-room!" Her cool voice drifted down the stairs.

She was sitting in a deep chair by the open window with her slim legs folded under her. She looked as if she had just stepped out of a shady garden, not from a railway carriage. He kissed her, careful not to crumple.

"I'd no idea. . . ." he began.

"You didn't get my telegram?"

He opened the envelope in his hand.

"I expect this is it. I went to Chambers early and the Post Office is sabbatarian as well as socialist."

His lower lip went out as he read the message. "Return to-morrow evening bringing Gorla."

"You don't mind, dear?"

"Of course not. She's your sister."

Who was it said that Adam took so readily to marriage because his wife had no relations?

"It's only to-night."

"Can't she stay a bit longer?"

Jim hoped the inquiry sounded cordial. He liked Gorla, but not in the thick of her crises.

Clemency unfolded her legs and came to sit on the arm of Jim's chair.

"I am t-taking your advice," she said tactfully. "She's promised to go with me to Aix."

Jim was silent. He was ashamed of a feeling of regret for the chance that Doris had given him and that he had refused. He wondered if he would have shown such virtue had he known that Clemency was going abroad. It was really rather tiresome of her to start just when he needed the support of her presence. And she claimed to do it at his advice!

"You don't mind?" Clemency asked anxiously.

Jim's hand enclosed hers.

"Of course, I mind losing you!" he said.

"She's in such a mess. He's impossible."

"What does your father say?"

"Nothing I could repeat. He dislikes him worse than the cubist she got engaged to who didn't know a middle-white from a middle-distance."

Jim walked across the room. An abyss whose bottom he could not see was open at his feet.

"Wouldn't it do if you stayed in Sussex?" he asked. "You wouldn't be so far away."

"But Tristram is in Sussex. The cinema people are re-taking that bit of film. The star said the lighting made her look her age. Couldn't you come to Aix?"

Not in the middle of term, Jim feared. Did she really think that Aix would do Gorla any good?

"If she's amused, she may forget him. She does, you know."

Jim did know.

"Where is she now?"

"Lying down. I thought we'd better take her out to-night. I've asked Charles Lindsey to dinner."

Jim, who had had a hard day's work and did not like men in the diplomatic service, picked up the evening paper without answering. Clemency knew the best way to handle her sister and if she thought it necessary to take her out to-night and then to Aix. . . .

"When do you go?" he asked.

Clemency broke off the head of a faded geranium in the window-box.

"To-morrow. Before she changes her mind. Onslow is packing."

"Oh, lor!" said Jim and dropped his paper. He was going to speak but stopped. He and Clemency never argued. If she had made up her mind to go, that was that. Only . . .

"It won't be for long," she consoled him. "Gorla's enthusiasms don't often last a fortnight!"

"A lot can happen in a fortnight!" Jim agreed.

II

A few hours later the four of them were sitting at a table in the only restaurant of London where, said Charles Lindsey, one could dance without meeting one's manicurist. An Italian waiter set four little birds cooked with peeled grapes in front of them.

"I'm starving!" said Gorla.

"Are you like me?" asked Lindsey. "Hunger makes me sentimental."

Gorla recalled the waiter.

"Bring the man another quail!" she directed.

Jim, who wondered what women could see in Charles Lindsey, made an unregretful note that Gorla had missed it. But the diplomat was irrepressible. He thanked the waiter as the man helped him to the second quail, and added for Gorla's benefit, "And satiety makes me passionate."

"Gosh!" she exclaimed. "Lead him away and dance with him, Clemency. Or does dancing have some other jazz effect?"

"Dancing with Mrs. Warlock," said Charles with a little bow, "makes me grateful to be alive."

Clemency laughed.

"You looked glad enough to stop dancing when Jim suggested supper."

The banter went on as Jim consulted the wine list. Not that the party needed drink to make it go. Gorla, for all her troubles, was in good form and looking her best with warm, bright colour and speed-

well blue eyes, in what she declared was the nakedest frock in London. There was not much more of it, he was prepared to bet, than of poor Doris's bathing suit. The comparison made the shopgirl seem nearer him in her shabby green dress and worn shoes than all the expensively frocked, groomed and jewelled women who packed the restaurant. A hundred wrists might poise over glass and plate—wrists fleshy and thin, sunburnt and powdered, bare and covered with diamonds—not one did he see as clearly as a weak, phantom wrist, with a little blue vein that throbbed.

He ordered the wine and gave his attention to the talk at the table. Lindsey was telling a story about something that had happened on a yacht, and was making Gorla laugh. What rubbish the man talked and how easily Gorla was amused! It was arrogance to pretend that these people were any more amusing than the bohemians or suburbans whose company Jim had lately sampled. A bit more polished, a little less uncouth, that was the only difference. And not a girl in the room was as pretty as Doris.

He plunged into conversation.

"Who is that woman at the table by the window?"

"Love at first sight?" laughed Clemency without turning round.

"On her side," retorted Jim. "She hasn't taken her eyes off us since she came in."

Lindsey glanced round casually, but, beyond a comment that she was a foreigner, he supplied no

information. Jim noticed that his eyes came back quickly to his plate.

"He knows her," he thought, and remembered Noel Frater's sally that Charles Lindsey had made love to women in every longitude—and with every latitude.

"I believe she's tight!" was Gorla's charitable contribution.

"A Latin sober is much like a Briton drunk," commented Jim profoundly.

With a moan from the saxophone, the dance began.

"Let's finish our supper," Clemency pleaded. "Jim and I are too old for alternate bites and supper-dances."

The dark woman, whose black eyes had hardly been lifted from the Warlock table, stood up. Her companion might have been moulded warm of yellow rubber. He laid his hand on her arm and spoke fast and earnestly. She freed herself like a retriever bitch shaking her coat.

"She's coming here," whispered Gorla with delight. "Jim's for it!"

But the Italian had no eyes for Jim. As she reached Lindsey's chair, she stopped to arrange a fiercely yellow orchid at her shoulder.

"You did not think you would see me here, Carlo!" she said in a low, clear voice.

Lindsey rose to his feet.

"My dear Ida!" he began. "What a pleasure——"

"Don't lie, Carlo," she said passionately. "The only pleasure I could give you now is to let you see me dead at your feet. . . ."

Before she could finish her sentence her companion had slid his arm round her waist and swung her into the swirl of dancers.

Lindsey eased his trousers at the knee and sat down.

"I knew her," he remarked casually, "when I was at the Embassy at Rome. What a wonderful voice she had!"

"It still carries well!" was Gorla's malicious comment.

Lindsey did not blush.

"You heard what she said?"

" 'Hell knows no fury . . . ' " quoted Jim and filled the glasses.

"She must be very fond of you," said Clemency quietly.

"If it comes to tags——" Lindsey answered and emptied his glass, " 'Il y a dans la jalousie, plus d'amour propre que d'amour.' "

"Always?" asked Clemency without looking up.

Lindsey considered her for a moment. Then he said that he supposed it depended on the woman.

"In any case," contributed Jim, "only a foreigner would make a scene in public."

Clemency laughed.

"Jim, you know as much about women as that bottle!"

"Less," put in Gorla. "Wine always goes with women."

Jim stood by his views.

"Don't tell me, Gorla, that any civilised woman you know would want to act like Lindsey's friend."

It was Clemency who answered.

"Do you think," she asked, "that when a woman loves, she stays civilised?"

Jim looked puzzled and Clemency dismissed the subject with a laugh.

"We're in deep waters. Does Mr. Lindsey know what is going to win the Derby on Wednesday?"

CHAPTER VII

I

Two mornings later Jim glanced without interest at the letters on the tray that carried his tea. Too soon to look for anything from Aix, he could hope for nothing better than circulars or bills. Gents' summer suitings . . . to account rendered . . . a very choice old tawny port. . . . It was as he had imagined. But that envelope was different. Tradesmen did not use buff notepaper with deckle edges. Nor did they form round, upright characters. Nor did they write to him from Edgware.

He hesitated before he opened the envelope. In spite of his thirty-five years, he could not repress a feeling of excitement. The same conflict had been engaged yesterday. As he left Chambers a voice inside had suggested a walk up Kingsway and west into Shaftesbury Avenue. But his cooler self had restrained the impulse and led him by his usual path along the Embankment to Westminster.

And now had come this letter from Doris. From the look of the paper, she had made a special expedition to the shops. The least he could do was to read what she wrote. There was no need to answer. He tore open the thick flap.

DEAR MR. WARLOCK [he read]:

I just wanted to thank you for being so kind on Saturday. My foot is all right and the silver thing looks lovely. I looked up your address in the book and Milly said you wouldn't like it, but I wanted to say thank you properly. I saw the girl you said was second prettiest on Sunday. She was furious.

Yours truly,
DORIS LEA.

No harm in that, thought Jim. He found himself wishing that an answer was needed, for he was loth to let her youth disappear from his life. The heyday of his contemporaries had been consumed in war. Its survivors were old before their time. Was it unfair to ask the generation that had gained by the sacrifice to lend something from their youth?

He did not think that Doris would be grudging. But Clemency? Suppose he told her that he was hankering after the company of an excessively pretty girl employed in Madame Ducette's shop in Shaftesbury Avenue. What would she say? Would not his vagary hurt her terribly?

That thought decided Jim to tear up the letter and to begin to strop his razor.

II

As he came back from the bathroom, he met Onslow in the passage with the news that a gentleman had called to see him.

"At a quarter to nine!" exclaimed Jim.

Onslow allowed herself a smile. She had warned the visitor that Mr. Warlock was getting up, to be

told that Mr. Warlock would want another place laid for breakfast.

Jim ran through the list of his more eccentric friends. He could think of no one anxious to see him at that time of the morning.

"Didn't he give his name?" he asked, and was surprised that he had not thought of John Tring. That old man was capable of anything. It was better to yield with good grace.

"Tell him to start," he said, and went on with his dressing.

"Your cook must be a Scotswoman!" were the words that met him as he opened the dining-room door.

"Her name is Woods," he answered, a little dazed.

"Her husband's name," Tring corrected him. "No one born south of the Tweed could make these scones. Remind me to get her recipe."

Jim walked to the window and looked out.

"Lovely day!" he remarked non-committally.

"Yes," said John Tring, "we are in luck."

But Jim was beginning to recognise his guest's gambit.

"To-day," he began steadily, "I am not laying any foundation stones, kicking off any Association footballs, shaking hands with any mayors or corporations or otherwise usurping the functions of royalty."

"No," said Tring soothingly, "but there is one

direction where we could not do better than follow the example of His Majesty."

"Which?" asked Jim.

"The Derby!" Tring helped himself to coffee.

Jim pointed out that he was a hard-working man.

"Less hard, I am prepared to bet, than the King of England," came the counter. "And do you imply that the Senior Service does not work? Yet Derby Day is a holiday in the Navy."

Weakening, Jim asked if he had seats in a stand. The veteran looked at him with pity.

"We aren't out to watch racing," he said gently. "We're going to see the Derby!"

Jim understood that the Heath was intended. After all that might be rather fun. He had little to do at Chambers. If the spirit of Frith was to be found anywhere in England it survived in the young heart of John Tring. He wondered if he would wear a green veil to his top hat.

"We'll meet at Victoria," he heard the melodious voice announce. "The eleven o'clock Pullman. It will be quicker than in your car."

Jim began to protest that he had not agreed to come. The old man did not seem to hear.

"Talking of your car," he went on, "what a delightful creature you succoured on Saturday! I hope her ankle is better."

Jim said that he hoped so too.

"What a coincidence meeting her at Chelsea and

at Farmers' Green!" The beautiful voice was very bland. "A dressmaker, I hear."

Jim told him where she worked. He was busy with the marmalade and did not see the smile that wrinkled the corners of the old eyes.

"She reminds me of another girl I took to the Derby," mused John Tring. "That was in Isinglass's year. Isinglass started at two to one on, and . . ."

Jim cut into the reminiscence.

"You aren't suggesting that we should take her with us?" he demanded.

John Tring innocently asked why not.

Jim hesitated. His real reason might sound poor-spirited to this dissolute elder.

"I don't expect she cares for horse-racing," he substituted. "It's all greyhounds now."

Tring nodded his white head.

"I expect you are right," he agreed. "Who said that beauty draws us to an electric hare?"

"Note Pope," said Jim. "But if you want me to come with you to the Derby, you must leave out Miss Doris Lea."

The old man sighed and dropped the subject.

III

He was waiting at the barrier when Jim reached the station. A pair of field glasses and an extra rake to his square brown hat told the world his destination.

With a nod at the crowd, Jim doubted that there would be a seat on the train.

Tring reassured him.

"I did some telephoning this morning," he said with a twinkle. "Incidentally, I booked two places in the Pullman."

The seats in question faced each other across a little table. Tring ordered a glass of sherry and a slice of cake.

"I see," he commented, after a glance at the midday paper, "that Elena Blore has got rid of poor old Gerald."

Jim understood that Lord Blore had given his wife plenty of provocation.

"His fancy had a way of straying," said Tring. "In all other respects he was a model husband. In his and my day the law took that into account. A little rope was allowed to a husband who was neither cruel nor an absentee."

"But none to a wife," Jim pointed out.

"If I may say so, my dear chap," the old man protested, "your generation is a trifle sentimental. Not only one law for the poor and the rich, but one for the man and the woman."

His listener thought that the alteration in the divorce law was not sentimental but scientific.

"What has science to do with it?" asked Tring. "I suppose you say that because Mr. and Mrs. Brown of South Kensington are both bi-manous, mammiferous vertebrates——"

Jim protested that he did not say anything of the sort. He did not know what it meant.

"That therefore they have the same propensities," persisted Tring, "which must be checked by the same set of rules?"

"Why not?" said Jim as the steward brought lunch.

"Because," John Tring retorted, seed cake in hand, "sticking to your scientific point of view, all through the animal kingdom any fool can see that the impulses of the sexes are different."

Jim raised his eyebrows.

"At the proper season of the year, does not the male animal with an amiable humility accept the first female he meets? While she exerts a free and capricious right of choice? I read an article on the ring-tailed lemur——"

The steward showing a tendency to linger, Jim interrupted with a doubt that our laws need be adapted to the marital failings of the ring-tailed lemur.

"No," admitted Tring, "but man has inherited the instincts of his simpler forebears. Part of the male inheritance is polygamy."

If it came to that, hazarded Jim, had not women inherited an instinct for polyandry?

"Possibly," John Tring assented. "But across the ages a measure of chastity has been forced on them by the superior strength and greater scarcity of the male. Any polyandrous impulse that the female sex may once have possessed has atrophied under this constant discouragement. With the result that a

woman can feel love, in its restricted sense, for no more than one man at a time."

Jim was silent and stared out of the window at the landscape ever renewed. The old man's opinions were cynically expressed, but at their heart there might be a grain of truth. Encouraged by the collapse of opposition, Dishonest John continued:

"How differently have men been formed! The instinct that they have inherited from the animals to unite with every female they meet has been reinforced by centuries of successful polygamy, whose degrees have varied from the ostentatious plurality of an oriental monarch to the discreet incontinence of the British middle classes."

He finished his sherry and looked at Jim for his assent. But Jim was hearing, put into words, an argument that his inarticulate desires had already urged. Therefore, he knew the answer. A man might have, he admitted, these instincts; it was not necessary to yield to them.

"Not necessary," agreed John Tring, "but rather fun! That is not the point. Man is so derived that Gerald Blore may have been technically unfaithful to poor Elena. Being by nature polygamous, he has given no proof of any lessening of his affection. Your scientific law takes no notice of that."

The train whisked through a station. Jim mentioned that it was even easier in other countries to dispose of an unsatisfactory husband.

"Doubtless," agreed Tring, nodding. "In the

States the 'dry' party would be glad to make a bottle of wine a sufficient ground for divorce. And to my mind a casual liaison may mean no more to a man than a bottle of wine."

Jim suggested a difference in expense.

"Supply and demand," explained the veteran. "Napoleon brandy costs a lot."

"You blame the law," said the barrister, "but nothing *compels* a woman to divorce her husband."

"It should not encourage her," replied Tring severely. The permanent way was rough and his erect body was suffering a succession of small jerks that made him frown. "How can a woman be expected to understand a man? With her body go her affections. Do you remember Lord Foppington in the old play? 'Of all things,' he says, 'that belong to a woman, I have an aversion to her heart. For when once she has given you her heart, you can never get rid of her body.' The converse is yet truer."

Jim laughed.

"Does Lord Tennyson take Lord Foppington?" he demanded.

John Tring asked what the poet had said on the subject.

"It always struck me as a bit pessimistic," was the answer. "Don't you remember? 'As the husband is, the wife is.' "

The old man snorted. The train was beginning to slow down.

"Tennyson sometimes wrote rubbish. No husband

was ever like any wife. Wives don't understand that. So they are hurt and retaliate, if the law abets them, by divorce."

Jim rose to his feet. The journey had seemed short. Tring's opinions were vivid and there was a certain amount of truth in them.

"Epsom!" cried the old man and felt for his race glasses. "My dear chap, you have talked so much that I haven't glanced at the form. But never mind. That will be an excuse to listen to the tipsters."

IV

. . . . *"Give a shilling to the baby. Thank you, sir. It'll bring you luck, sir. Give a shilling to the baby."* . . . *"Fresh 'ilks! Fresh 'ilks! All the way from the sea."* . . . *"And shall I tell yer 'ow I knows? Would yer like ter know? Very well, then. My eldest brother is a close friend of Lord Durby. And 'is lordship says to Bert, 'Bert, would yer like to 'ear what'll win at Hepsom?' And Bert says, 'Yes, my lord, that I should.' 'Very well,' says Lord Durby. And 'ere is 'is hinformation hin a henvelope for hany o' yer that's got a tanner!"* . . . *"The wages of sin is death. That is as true to-day, my brothers, as when it was said in Palestine two thousand years ago."* . . . *"Hoice cream, a penny! Hoice cream, a penny!"* . . . *"Which one d'ye want? Midnight Sun, twenty to one. Fancy Queen, seven to two. Give it a name. Tens to you, mother. Thank you, colonel, and the number's nine ought three."* . . . *"White heather,*

lady, lucky white heather. Buy a bunch of lucky white heather!" . . .

"Ma, look at Charlie, whoop, he's at it again! (pom, pom).
Then Ma said—my darling, you should never complain,
Go on, me girl, and don't be shy,
Your dad did that in the days gone by. . . ."

"Have your photograph took, me lord. Give your girl a treat. Finished while you wait" . . . "And I said, 'Mrs. Smith,' I said, 'I don't seem to fancy that bit of ham, though I'm sure if you say it's fresh then it is fresh,' I said." . . . "Seven shies for sixpence and the choice of a marble clock or a gilt vause. Ladies 'arf way. Seven shies for sixpence" . . . "I'll lay three ter one ther field. Three ter one ther field. Wot, fours about ther favourite? Not bloody likely. I ain't come to Hepsom for me 'ealth. Three to one ther field." . . . "Lead, koindly loight amid th' encircling gloo-oom, Lead thou me oo-on, Ther noight is dark. . . ." "You've a lucky face, lady. Give a shilling to the baby. It'll bring you luck. Give a shilling to the baby. . . ."

V

John Tring's zest was enormous. He inspected the baby for measles and advised the mother, whose tow-coloured fringe swept her bold eyes, on their

treatment. He bared his white head as a procession of revivalists, Adam's apples bulging over bootlace ties, stumped past with hell-thirsty banners.

From a bookmaker in his shirt sleeves, who was treating a thirst with a pint of stout, he acquired a racecard and a wealth of information on the recent running of the horses. He deserted this fount of knowledge to smell the bunch of purple stocks that a gipsy was offering for sale and to try her with a few words of Romany that he claimed. He acknowledged the greeting of a tipster in a jockey's cap and silk that appeared to date from Hermit's year, and admitted to the surrounding crowd that he had seen him at every Derby for twenty Junes. He offered his services as referee in a cocoanut shying contest between a drunken sailor and a pot-boy from New Cross. He stopped at a fish barrow and engaged its owner on the moot point of the best age for a whelk. He pored over the *chefs-d'œuvre* of a tin-plate photographer, but decided that he was too old to have his own portrait taken. At every stage of his conspicuous progress, he radiated benevolence without, Jim noticed, disbursing a halfpenny. Familiar with Tom, Dick and Harry, neither Harry, Dick nor Tom attempted the faintest familiarity.

Jim, too, was enjoying himself. To-day was a holiday, not only from work but from the tedious realities of the work-a-day world. Solicitors, judges, bank balances, Georgian houses, relations in Sussex, responsibilities of marriage—those solemnities could

wait. What counted to-day were the fanciful names of horses, the gay colours of their jockeys, the imperturbable blare of the roundabouts, the price of whelks, ice-cream or hot-dogs, the back answers of tipsters and their dupes, the indomitable decency and good humour of an English crowd, the scarlet and white boards of the bookies and their jingling bags, the blue sky and the yellow and black sky-signs that dotted it, the laughing girls and their smiling mothers, the red buses that had stopped being public conveyances and turned into grandstands: all this evanescent triumph of Merry England over the England that expects every man every day to do his duty.

At last Tring turned from a banjoist with a blackened face and a wide Eton collar. Something in the comedian's bloodshot eye may have warned him that the straw hat would shortly circulate.

"What about finding somewhere to watch the race?" suggested Jim.

The old man looked at his watch and declared that there was time to visit the side shows at the bottom of the hill.

The crowd grew thinner as the adventurers stepped carefully over the slippery brown turf that sloped towards Tattenham Corner. Behind them the shouting of the bookies blurred into the rumour of a great town. In front, the conflicting discords of the steam organs began to sort into tunes. John Tring seemed to search for something. He favoured with a scant

glance of benevolence an urchin deep in a clog dance, who earlier in the day could have counted on him for audience. He passed the first merry-go-round they reached, though its steeds were race-horses with racing colours. He did not comment on the red-flannel drawers of a matron who landed at his feet on a mat that hurtled out of the Helter-Skelter Lighthouse. He did not linger at the doorway of the Cave of Merriment ("Split your Sides for Six-pence"), or exchange a word with the lady in dirty ballet skirts who kept the pay-box of the Katzen-jammer Castle ("Visited by the Prince of Wales"). In an open space by a second roundabout he stopped and looked anxiously in every direction.

"That is what I want to see," he exclaimed and taking Jim by the arm led him to a small striped tent. In letters a foot high, Jim read aloud the words "BELLA, THE MAGIC LADY." He glanced at his guide. The aquiline features were serious. Was magic or the lady the lure? Anything might happen with John Tring, and on Derby day. Jim shrugged his shoulders and submitted to his destiny.

The inside of the tent was dark. The handful of spectators had to be located more by their giggles than their forms. At the far end glowed an oblong of orange-coloured light. In the upper half of the space floated the head, neck and bosom of a robust Jewess. Her cheeks were dabbed with rouge and little blobs of black stuck to her lashes. What there

was of her was dressed in blue and spangles. The silhouette of a bowler hat bobbed into the oblong, and a cockney voice began to declaim.

"The signification of the name Bella his, has many of you hare no doubt haware, 'beautiful,' and I ham shore my 'earers will a-gree that Bella 'ere *his* beautiful. Hain't you, Bella?"

The head nodded complaisantly on its double chin. Jim's surprise did not abate. Why had Lord Woolmouth's brother so sedulously brought him to gaze on the upper third of a Whitechapel Jewess or to listen to the patter of a showman from the slums?

"Jest now I fancied I 'eard a gentleman hin the back row mention the word 'mirrors.' Ter prove that such his not the caise, I will pawss my stick acrors the spaice where hany mirror would 'ave ter be lo-cated. Hany gentleman hof the haudience his hat liberty ter do the same, prer-vided 'e does not hattempt hany familiarities with their Magic Lady."

A dark figure slouched forward, to be ruthlessly jerked back by the nymph at its side. A whisper of "I'll bella you," set the tent a-titter. Jim wondered if Tring would volunteer. Old men were sometimes odd, and John might cherish a hopeless passion for the sublime detachment of head and bust. But his companion did not budge.

"Ter prove ter you that *with* all 'er shortcomings Bella *his* 'uman, she will now, with my hassistance, con-sume a cup o' tea," went on the showman and,

holding a dirty enamel cup to the scarlet lips, showed that his charge could make as much noise drinking as any of her more complete sisters.

John Tring leaned against the pole of the tent and examined his finger-nails. Jim had the impression that he was waiting.

"Be-fore maiking 'er a-jews," continued the man in the bowler hat, "Bella his prepared ter answer hany question hany of you wishes ter put. Hand so conclude the see-ance."

There was an embarrassed silence. Then a thick voice from the back of the tent asked what would win the Derby.

"If I knew," the full lips answered, as they had answered every June for fourteen years, "I wouldn't be here. You'd find me at the bookies."

The sally encouraged her audience. A girl with adenoids asked if Bella was married.

"I've got me troubles, the same as the rest of you," was the answer.

"Arsk her about the future," prompted the showman. "She kin see further than most of us."

Again there was a pause, and a few questions and ambiguous answers about babies, journeys and marriages followed. Then a girl's voice came hesitating out of the dark. Before he had heard three words, Jim knew the tones. Doris was in the tent, was within reach of his hand! As soon as the light went up he would see her again, touch that little, weak wrist. . . .

"Is this a lucky year for me?" her voice was asking the Magic Lady.

The pythoness stared into the darkness. For a minute there was no answer.

"That depends on what you mean by luck," she pronounced at last.

Doris tried to make her question easier.

"Am I going to be happy?"

"Very happy," said the sybil, "while your luck lasts. And very lucky when your happiness goes. Luckier, I think, than the others."

"Oh well!" said Doris Lea.

But Jim had hardly heard the duologue. Contentment in the girl's presence had given way to astonishment. Wonder was replaced by indignation. Long as the arm of coincidence might be, he suspected that Dishonest John's was longer. He remembered that he had told the old man where Doris worked. He recalled his little smile on the platform at Victoria and his mention of the telephone. John Tring, in elderly determination to gain his point and in the puckish spirit that was peculiar to him, had guided Jim's footsteps and Doris's by hidden and devious ways to this tent.

Jim decided that, quite apart from any question of morals, he would not be overreached by any old gentleman, however bland and artful. There was a move that would checkmate every stratagem. He had only to step out of the tent to vanish into the crowd and

leave John Tring and Doris Lea to console each other.

At that moment the man in the bowler hat drew the curtains in front of Bella and switched on the light.

CHAPTER VIII

I

JIM WARLOCK had only to take one look at Doris to be very glad that he had not listened to the voice of his irritation.

An emerald green hat was drawn down on her forehead and a green leather coat stopped knee high on firm, slim legs. She might, thought Jim, look like a pillion girl, but lovely enough to let any pillion driver die happy.

At first, so busy was her mind with Bella, she did not see him. Then some sense of his nearness made her look over her shoulder.

"Oh, Mr. Warlock!" she cried, and her eyes shone. "Isn't she wonderful?"

For all his thirty-five years of experience his heart did not seem to have room inside his ribs. He could not find anything to say. Her warm hand lay quiet in his grasp. He felt how slender were its bones. If he shut his fist, he believed he would smash them. She made no effort to move.

"Bella said I'd be lucky this year," she murmured, and her eyes found his. "I think she's right."

"She said 'luckier than the others,' " corrected a thin voice. "I see I am one of the others!"

From behind the chequer-board bulk of a publican on holiday emerged the flaming head of Miss Miles. In the scarlet *béret* she affected, it seemed to add to the heat of the tent.

"No one ever holds *my* hand," she complained. "But there, virtue never did gather any moss!"

One proverb suggests another. Two birds, Jim saw, could be settled with one stone.

"This is Mr. Tring," he said. "Miss Miles."

The indomitable veteran raised his hat. Milly extended a purple hand.

"Very glad to meet you!" she remarked. "I think it's dull for two young ladies being by themselves all day, don't you?"

"Miss Lea and I are going on the roundabout," interposed Jim. "Will we find you two here when we come back?"

John Tring's mouth opened but before voice could issue, Jim had seized Doris's green sleeve and hurried her from the tent.

"Quick!" he urged.

The merry-go-round outside the tent was spinning like a lethargic cyclone. Jim helped the girl on to the platform. Without questioning his right of abduction, she was preparing to mount an ostrich.

"Wait!" said Jim and looked behind him. The couple they had evaded had reached the doorway of the tent, ready to intercept the truants when the machine had earned their threepences. The half-cycle it fetched gave a second's cover.

"Now!" cried Jim and bent to slip his arm behind Doris's silken knees. He straightened and lifted her off her feet. Her slippery coat rubbed confidingly against his side. Then he jumped her clear of the moving platform on the grass at the further side.

"Ooh!" said Doris. "You *are* strong!"

His blood raced. Pleasure in his dexterity was joined with glee at the punishment of Tring and the escape from Milly. A man felt young holding a slim, warm body with a faint perfume of leather against his heart.

"You might have broken your leg," Doris scolded him.

"Not with you," he pointed out. "You're as light as a little cat!"

But even on Derby Day he couldn't carry a pretty girl all round Epsom Heath. Reluctantly, he set her down. They faced the slope whose crowded surface seemed to slide upwards with the impersonal precision of an escalator.

"Will your friend be all right?" she asked presently.

"No!" said Jim. "But he has got what he deserves!"

The corners of the girl's mouth drooped.

"You're angry with him because he 'phoned me. Oh, I thought you were glad!"

Jim felt tactless.

"I *am* glad," he reassured her. "Awfully glad."

She cast about for reasons.

"You don't like Milly?"

Jim confessed that he was frightened of her.

"She *is* plain, isn't she! I always say a girl ought to take more pains with herself."

"Do you?" he asked and gave the answer, "I don't think you need to."

"I spend an awful lot on clothes," she confessed. "I bought this coat to come with you to-day. At least I didn't exactly buy it. Did I tell you about a girl called Olive? Well, this is really her coat, but last summer I lent her . . ."

Jim was vouchsafed a complicated glimpse into the communistic ways of young women. Before the transaction had been cleared up, the couple had climbed high enough for a view of the course.

"That's the place!" said Jim.

He pointed to a little knoll already occupied by a knot of enthusiasts.

"Anywhere you like," submitted Doris.

A shilling to a pudding-faced child hired a case that had once held beer and raised Doris's eyes above the heads of her neighbours. The hand that she laid on his shoulder to steady herself sent an absurd, protective thrill along Jim's nerves.

"Mounted police," she announced. "They're clearing the course."

An elderly man with a bottle-nose and a faint flavour of the stables that recalled to Jim his boyhood, touched his hat.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but can you see the draw with them glasses of yours?"

Jim raised his race glasses to his eyes. His hand brushed Doris's.

"Oh, I do hope he's well drawn, indeed I do!" sighed a stout woman.

The sigh burst open her white bodice at the back. Jim asked the name of her fancy. A freckled flapper nudged her quickly.

"Now, Ma, you know we promised not to say!"

Curiosity struggled with caution in the capacious bosom. She appealed to the bottle-nose.

"Do you think it matters now, Mr. Sturge?"

Mr. Sturge hesitated.

"Well, Mrs. Bramming, seeing as I 'ad the hinformation, so to speak, confidential . . ."

A middle-aged man whose sandy eyebrows and a gold albert suggested the village grocer interrupted.

"Confidential my foot! Every one at the Dog and Duck heard what he said."

Mr. Sturge looked severely at the freethinker.

"And 'ow much would he 'ave said if I 'adn't stood him the fourth pint?" he asked, and paused to let the shaft home. "Not but what there was plenty ready to profit by what I spent!"

Mrs. Bramming interposed in the interest of peace.

"I'm sure we're all very grateful to Mr. Sturge," she said. Her tact did not satisfy a youth with red cheeks and a curl brilliantined on his forehead.

"Wot we want to know is 'ow the 'orse is drawn,"

he grumbled. "And this gentleman can tell us, if we give the name."

Doris Lea's curiosity had been aroused. Nor was she sorry to show off the qualities of her escort.

"I'm sure," she said coldly, "you can trust my friend not to say anything to any one."

"Of course we can," agreed the grocer. "I haven't come so far and told my wife so many lies for nothing."

Mrs. Bramming heaved with merriment and burst another button.

"Told her he'd gone to Salisbury on business!" she confided in Doris. "The things we women have to put up with!"

Mr. Sturge had made up his mind. He approached his mouth to Jim's ear.

"The 'orse we've come to see led in," he whispered hoarsely, "is number fourteen on the card."

Jim glanced at his race card.

"Western Monarch," he read. "I shouldn't have thought he had a chance."

"That's as may be," said the bottle-nosed man oracularly. "But 'ow's 'e drawn?"

Jim scanned the board.

"On the rails!" he announced.

The knoll heaved with satisfaction. Mrs. Bramming clasped her plump hands.

"I knew it!" she declared. "I had a Feeling!"

Doris seemed to have one too.

"Jim," she exclaimed, and in her excitement did not

seem to notice the Christian name, "I want to put a shilling on Western Monarch!"

"He's a hopeless outsider!" whispered Jim, fighting against the infection of enthusiasm.

His voice was not pitched low enough. It hurt Mr. Sturge's pride, and aided by several half pints, overcame his discretion.

He was, it appeared, a groom at "the Park." His duties, Jim was to understand, sometimes took him to the Dog and Duck. Ten days ago, who should he meet but Hislop's head lad, Mr. Priddy? As Jim would know, Hislop's stables were on the Plain. The day was hot and Mr. Priddy thirsty. After the fourth pint he became mysterious. There was a horse in training on the Plain that had the Derby as good as won.

"That'll be Fairhaven," Mr. Sturge had said, mentioning the favourite.

"I ain't naming no names," parried Mr. Priddy, "but if you knew what I know, you could help yourself to the cash with a shovel."

That night the village had something to discuss. Of the two Derby runners trained on the Plain, which did the head lad mean? Lord Zedburgh's fashionably bred chestnut, or plain Mr. Pye's obscure outsider?

The argument raged for a week and the Dog and Duck was drunk dry. The company into which Doris and Jim had stumbled represented the speculative group who held that shovels meant long prices. They

had come all the way from Wiltshire to witness the triumph of Western Monarch, against whose chance of winning the bookmakers estimated the odds to be as thirty-three to one.

"Please, Jim!" reiterated Doris at the end of the groom's recital, "I want to put a shilling on Western Monarch."

"You'll be doing a good thing for yourself, my dear," agreed Mrs. Bramming and beamed on Jim. "You have one, too, sir. We'll keep your place while you're away."

Doris was fumbling in her purse. Jim laid his hand over it.

"I'll put a pound on for the two of us," he stated.

"Thirty-three pounds!" anticipated Doris Lea.

When Jim came back from the bookmakers, the horses were being walked in parade along the straight.

"Look, Jim," said Doris, "that's ours—the jockey with the white cap."

"Western Monarch looks in rare good condition," announced the grocer, who had an excellent view of the horse's ears.

The nineteen runners had been led past the stands and past the royal box. The grooms let go their heads and between the hats and caps of the crowd Jim could see the flash of the hard, bright colours of the jockeys, and through the shoutings of the bookies could hear the clop-clop of the hooves that cantered to the starting gate.

"I knows a 'orse when I sees one," stated Mr. Sturge. "And that Western Monarch, 'e moves like a champion."

"Which was Fairhaven?" asked the young man with the curl, who Jim thought must be a gardener at "the Park."

" 'E's no good," was the stout-hearted reply. "I didn't even notice 'is colours."

"Green and gold, black cap and sleeves," read Doris off Jim's card, her cheek very close to his arm.

"He's a good favourite," said Jim. "At six to four."

The crowd roared and fell dumb. The shouting of the bookies, the music of the steam organs was stilled. The drone of an aeroplane high overhead became audible.

"They're off," explained the grocer unnecessarily.

Necks were craned to no purpose, but rumours from some obscure source filled the place of sight.

"The favourite left at the post!" . . . "Opera Girl in the lead."

Doris clasped her hands and wriggled.

"Isn't it a thrill?" she exclaimed.

A thin man with a black beard and a panama hat, his race glasses flapping round his neck, came from higher up the hill.

"A jockey with a white cap in front," he shouted as he passed.

The contingent from Wiltshire gave a cheer.

"Good old Monarch!"

Jim felt it kindest to be cruel.

"Lord Derby's jockey has a white cap too," he pointed out. "It might be King's Ransom."

Doris's elbow gave him a sharp dig.

"Of course it's Western Monarch," she said.

"'Ere they come," shouted Sturge. "Now, sir, can't you see?"

Jim raised his glasses.

"There's one horse a couple of lengths in front," he commented. "By God! It *is* Western Monarch!"

"I knew he'd win," said Mrs. Bramming. "I had a Feeling!"

A middle-aged man in a white waistcoat that nearly reached his knees pushed his way on the knoll. Its occupants were too excited to be indignant.

"I've often seen 'em start like that," he said sourly. "They don't last. Before they get to Tattenham Corner, they're beat."

A bookmaker seemed to share his opinion. His hoarse voice split the silence.

"I'll give ten to one against Western Monarch!"

The gap between the first and second shortened.

"Green and gold coming up!" said Jim. "That's Fairhaven!"

"I never felt easy in my mind about 'im!" said the gardener gloomily.

"The one in front will crack before he reaches the Corner," repeated the pessimist in the white waistcoat.

Doris's hands closed and her fists hammered on Jim's shoulder.

"No, he won't!" she cried. "He's going to win!"

The string of horses became a bunch as they neared Tattenham Corner.

"Our horse is on the rails," said Jim, "but Fairhaven is catching him!"

"That's what I said," reiterated the middle-aged man. "Beat before he reaches the Corner."

"Fairhaven's in front now," admitted Jim.

"If that isn't too bad!" cried Mrs. Bramming in her disappointment.

The horses leaned over as they rounded the bend. They entered the straight and the chestnut led by half a length. Behind him white cap battled on. Another length to the rear four horses, their colours a blur of scarlet and gold, lay bunched together.

"Fairhaven wins!" the crowd began to shout.

Half-way down the straight the order held good and the distance between the leaders increased. Then the favourite had had enough. He changed legs and dropped back rapidly.

"Hurray!" cried Doris. "Ours is in front!"

"He's beat," said white waistcoat. "He won't ever reach the winning post!"

His gloom seemed justified. It was courage alone that kept Western Monarch going. He had a lead of a length, and under a furlong to go.

It was then that the jockey of Oratorio decided that his moment had arrived. Out came his whip and

the scarlet and white stars of a Soap King shot out of the ruck.

Every stride carried the great black stallion nearer to the exhausted leader. He reached his heels, his quarters—now his head was level with his withers. On plodded Western Monarch, gallantly fighting a losing battle. Oratorio's jockey gave his mount another cut and the black drew level with the bay.

"Go on, Monarch!" screamed Doris, "Go on!"

Perhaps he heard her. More likely he saw the goal so near and Oratorio level. He threw the last ounce of his strength into the scale and his head with its straining, blood-flecked nostrils passed the white post a foot in front of Oratorio.

II

It was not until the numbers went up that the little group on the knoll knew which horse had won.

Jim, watching the board through his glasses, read out the result.

"Fourteen on top," he announced. "Then . . ."

He never finished the sentence for Doris's fists pounding in the small of his back made him choke. Her hot hand gripped his ear and pulled his face to meet her mouth. Before he could kiss her back, she ducked to avoid Mr. Sturge's new bowler hat that went rocketing past her head into the firmament.

The gardener caught the freckled flapper by the waist and whirled her round. The flapper boxed his ears and whirled him round. Mrs. Bramming shook

Doris's hand up and down like a bottle of medicine and boasted of her "Feeling." The man in the white waistcoat declared without shame that he had picked Western Monarch the moment he saw him in the parade. The grocer tied a red silk handkerchief to the hook of his umbrella and waved it wildly about his head. When he had knocked off Jim's hat, his apology took the form of a slap on the back and an invitation to come to a booth and drink the winner's health.

But Jim was in a hurry to visit his bookie who looked as if he, too, might possess a turn of speed. He arrived in time.

"I wonder you have the heart," said the man with the bag, "to take so much money from old Bill Blower!"

Wetting his thumb, he counted out the notes regretfully.

"I haven't," confessed Jim. "But this lady has!"

He folded the money in a square and forced it into Doris's purse.

She protested vigorously. She wouldn't dream. She had only said a shilling.

Mrs. Bramming, on her way to collect her winnings, saw the struggle.

"Let him, dearie!" she whispered in the girl's ear. "It isn't long they want to!"

"Of course you must," insisted Jim. "It was your bet!"

"He's a nice gentleman." The fat woman envel-

oped his hand in a moist clasp. "I hope you'll both be very happy!"

Doris looked at Jim and laughed. He laughed back and wanted to know whether they should stay on the hill or visit the side-shows.

"I'm not particular," said Doris, but showed her hand by asking: "Did you see they've got a switchback?"

For an hour they sampled together the inventions of subtle and ingenious minds, united in an Einstein-like scorn of Newton's law. For another hour they threw darts into boards, hurled balls at cocoa-nuts, shot bullets through bottles, tossed hoops over vases. Doris, Jim found with relief, had an indifferent aim. Beyond a green teddy bear and a bowl of goldfish, they emerged from the orgy of marksmanship with empty arms.

They were both very happy Doris, because a "popular West-end clubman" and a "rising young barrister" was glad to spend the day with her; and because she liked switchbacks; and because Jim was such a dear. He, because the prettiest girl he had ever seen showed she liked him; and because Derby Day made him feel young again; and because a day is so short . . .

At last it occurred to Jim to ask his companion if they should try to find some tea.

"I'd love a cup," said Doris and added, "I didn't have time for any lunch."

Jim felt guilty, but short of ice-cream and whelks, he could see nothing to eat. Ought he to take her back to London and see that she had a proper meal? It would be rather fun. There was that quiet place in Jermyn Street. . . . But dinner with Doris in London was a more serious step than hoop-la with Doris on Epsom Heath.

"That'll do us," said Doris, and demonstrated the different part food plays in life at twenty-one and thirty-five. She led him to a booth where a perspiring matron ladled tea out of a steaming copper into cups half-an-inch thick. Beside her stood a wooden crate of doughnuts. Jim balanced the teddy bear on the goldfish while he struggled for a cup.

"Do look at that old man," Doris whispered. "I'm sure he's hungry."

Jim's eyes followed the jerk of her chin. At first glance the man did not look quite as old as his clothes. The hair under the furred top hat was black, but grey bristles on cheek and chin hinted at dye. A large paper flower decorated with mockery the lapel of his frock coat, worn so thin that each thread of the web showed separate in the sunlight. Dingy white spats seemed to sneer at the cracked boots. A cane, which had by now abandoned any pathetic pretence to be jaunty, bent under the pressure of his lean body.

"Poor old boy!" said Jim and held out to Doris her cake and tea.

"I couldn't! Not with him looking like that," she answered.

Protest died on Jim's lips. The man's eyes under their film of age were fixed on the doughnuts in the crate. Among all the colour and life and excitement that pulsed on Epsom Heath he was only aware of their golden brown succulency.

Jim cleared his throat.

"We were wondering . . ." he began.

"What's that?" The voice was hoarse but its accent was educated.

"We were just going to have tea. We wondered if you'd have some too."

The man did not speak. He nodded and with a shaky hand took the food that Jim offered. Jim saw that the frock coat was buttoned across a paper shirt front and a ragged vest. He wanted to leave him. There was something terrible in a misery reduced to parade its grotesqueness for the few coppers that the compassionate or the uncomprehending might fling.

"I'll get some more," said Doris.

When she had gone, the old man spoke.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm a nuisance to you. It's been a bad day. I haven't taken a penny."

To keep the conversation casual, Jim asked him if he came every year to the Derby. He nodded.

"I've taken as much as a pound. I sing them 'The Man That Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo,' and 'I'm Gilbert the Filbert.' They used to like those

songs, but I'm getting old. I make mistakes in the words and I can't always think of the jokes."

Jim suggested that he would feel better when he had had a bit to eat.

The old man shook his head. "It isn't only food. My legs get tired. I'm out of date. They want jazz."

Doris came back with a bundle of doughnuts wrapped in a newspaper.

"Here's a bit of supper," she said.

With fumbling hands he stuffed one of the cakes into his mouth and hid the rest in the pockets of the threadbare coat.

"They mustn't see me carrying anything," he explained. "It doesn't look the part."

Doris took out her purse and extracted a note from the wad Jim had given her.

"That's good of you," said the derelict. "I don't suppose you can afford so much, but I'll take it and grateful. You won't want me to sing you 'Gilbert the Filbert' for it?"

"I'd like that very much," said Doris kindly. "But you must save your voice."

The old man chuckled. The touch of money had restored his spirits.

"I never saved anything. I wouldn't be singing outside public houses if I had. You needn't believe it, but I used to drive my own horses."

Jim felt it was time to leave. A life story seemed imminent.

As they started towards the station, "Don't you

think that pound ought to bring us luck?" asked Doris.

Before he could answer, a thin voice pierced the gabble of the crowd. With cane tucked under his armpit and a parody of a swagger in his out-turned elbows, their friend had broken into song. Some of the women drinking tea at the booth were listening and laughing.

> "The Pride of Piccadilly, the blasé roué,
> Oh Hades! The Ladies! . . ."

sang Gilbert the Filbert. And, as he jerked round at the end of each line, Jim saw the bent knees sag.

He set his face towards the station.

"It isn't much fun getting old," he remarked to his companion, "but I expect it helps to remember that you have driven your own horses."

His next words showed that he had drawn the moral.

"Will you have dinner with me somewhere," he asked. "To-night?"

CHAPTER IX

I

JIM leaned back and caught the wine-waiter's eye.

"You were right about the brandy," he said. "I'll have another."

Doris blew a cloud of smoke through her reddened lips.

"You don't ask me if I'll have another *crême de menthe,*" she pouted.

Jim laid his hand on hers.

"You've had enough."

Her dark eyes opened their widest and she drew herself up.

"I hope you don't think I'm tight," she protested.

Her hand remained to reassure him that her feelings were not irreparably hurt.

"Not tight," said Jim. "Do you want to be?"

Doris shook her head.

"I don't like wine, really. Except Wincarnis. That's good, I think."

Jim smiled. He had guessed her palate when he ordered a bottle of very sweet Moët Chandon.

"Olive always says," she quoted, "that it isn't nice for a girl to smoke and drink too. Do you think she's right?"

Jim didn't suppose it mattered much nowadays. People did what they liked.

"Do you do what you like?" she asked him.

"I have to-day."

Doris stopped examining her powdered nose in the mirror on the wall to flash him a smile.

"I always say people ought to let us do what we like. After all, we're only young once. Auntie Maud used to be so angry when I said that."

Jim felt obliged to back up Auntie Maud.

"You might land in a frightful mess," he pointed out.

"I did once," she told him candidly.

There had been, it seemed, a man. Quite old he was. Thirty or thereabouts. She was seventeen. She let him take her to theatres—the stalls—and out to dinner.

"If a gentleman likes to give a girl a good time, you can't blame her, can you?"

One evening he took her on the river. In a backwater he told her what he wanted.

"Well, I said I hadn't thought of anything of that sort. I hadn't either; though, of course, I knew what men are. But he'd always been so respectful. So I told him I couldn't, really. Then I saw he was crying. He said he was crazy about me. So I said if he felt like that about it, perhaps it didn't matter very much. I don't think it does, do you, if you're fond of a person? But both of you have to be fond. That's what I found. I felt dreadful afterwards."

"What happened then?" asked Jim gently.

"Nothing. I told him I couldn't ever see him again. I was dreadfully afraid I'd have a baby and have to tell Auntie Maud. But nothing happened."

Jim wondered why she had made him her confidant. She was twisting her napkin and the words came slowly. Perhaps she read surprise in his face.

"I thought I'd better tell you that. I didn't want you to think I was better than I am. Not that I did any harm to anyone," she added defiantly.

Jim was grateful for her frankness. All dinner he had resisted the message her nearness flashed to his senses. Warmed by good food, sweet wine and the heat of the little restaurant, she was sitting very close to him on the padded seat, her leather coat laid aside, her young curves revealed by an emerald jumper. She showed her liking and let him suspect that it was strong enough to refuse nothing he might ask. But a scruple had held him back. Any man might take a girl to the races and to dinner. The post of her first lover called for a paragon—or a cad.

The story she had told breached his restraint. She was admirably free from pretence. And her philosophy was as good as another. "So long as you hurt no one, where's the harm?"

He would not hurt her. He would try to make her happy; he would take care of her; he would provide for her. And when the end came, he would leave her a better opinion of men and their love than her friend in the backwater. There wasn't so much hap-

piness going a-begging for Jim and Doris to waste what each could yield the other.

He had been as honest as she, telling her that he was married and fond of his wife. If Doris did not mind. . . .

But Clemency would mind. The thought of her made him move a few inches farther from his neighbour. Not that Clemency would ever know. Aix was a long way off. And the adventure would be over before she was back. It wouldn't in the least affect his feelings towards her. Had not John Tring on the way to Epsom told a truth that every honest husband would admit, "a casual liaison may mean no more than a bottle of wine?"

He would imperil Clemency's happiness by thinking about Doris and desiring her more than by any physical act. In one way the soundest course was to work her beauty out of his blood. . . .

"A penny!" said Doris, and pinched out her cigarette.

Jim struggled back to a world where duty takes precedence of desire.

"I was thinking that it is time you started home," he said firmly, and beckoned to the waiter.

Doris's mouth opened.

"You're angry with me," she murmured. "What have I done?"

"Nothing," said Jim, and added, "It's myself I am angry with. Men are such rotters."

The tip of her tongue showed between her lips. Her great black eyes were fixed on his face.

"Girls like rotters," she breathed.

He shook his head.

"Remember the other time. You might feel 'dreadful' again."

She shook her head slowly. Her eyes did not leave his.

"You're different. Quite different. I've longed to find some one like you."

"Not much of a chap!" said Jim with feeling. "Waiter, damn you, the bill!"

"You're going to leave me?"

Her lip trembled.

"I'm going to put you in a taxi and send you back to Edgware."

"If you'd tell me what I said to make you angry!"

"The only fault in you is that you are too lovely! The rest of the blame is mine."

Doris picked a rose out of the bowl on the table, and tore it to pieces, petal by petal.

"Because . . . your wife?" she asked at last.

"Partly. And partly you."

"That's my look-out."

"It could only last a little time."

"I know. I'd be content."

He shook his head. He had dropped his gaze before her shining pagan eyes, and was watching the flower petals fall like the moments he was wasting. What a fool John Tring would think him! With a

girl so lovely and so ready to take the risk . . .!

The waiter brought the change. His interruption pulled Jim back from the brink.

"Tell the boy to find a taxi that will take this lady as far as Edgware," he ordered.

II

In the lobby where he waited for Doris to put on her coat, he found Charles Lindsey in the act of accepting a sleek top hat from an equally sleek attendant. He congratulated himself on the L-shape of the restaurant which had hidden him and his companion from the diplomat. For if Lindsey was a source of scandal in himself, he was also an active channel for its dissemination.

"Hullo, Warlock!" was his greeting. "Your wife not gone to Aix?"

His assumption that they were together proved that he had seen nothing. If only Doris was not too quick with her coat! What bad luck to be caught out the very moment that virtue had triumphed! A twinge of regret warned Jim that the triumph was not so secure. He determined to burn the bridge behind him.

"Come and have a drink at the club, Lindsey," he said casually. "In a quarter of an hour."

The bridge had caught nicely. When he had seen Doris into her cab and out of his life, he would walk slowly to his club for a whisky and soda and an aim-

less talk with a man he rather disliked. Then he would go home and read that detective story.

"Sorry," said Lindsey and put out the flames. "I've got to take Polly to dance somewhere."

Down the stairs a whiff of musk preceded a flexible form in a golden cloak. Lindsey took an arm up which bracelets mounted from elbow to armpit.

"Good-night, old man," he remarked. "We'll have that drink another time."

In silence Jim watched the well-waisted back and the fur collar like a fan disappear into a taxi. From somewhere level with his shoulder blades came the small voice of Doris Lea.

"I saw you were with some one. I waited on the stairs."

Jim felt a brute. With the highest of motives, he did not seem to be treating the girl very well. He noticed that the sparkle had gone out of her eyes and that her mouth drooped at the corners.

The page-boy at the open door reported that he could not find a taxi willing to go to Edgware. On Derby night there were plenty of short fares.

"I'll go by tube," said Doris.

"No, we'll walk to the garage where they keep my car," said Jim.

III

He put his foot hard down on the brake pedal. The terra-cotta front of the narrow block of flats

was dark save for one yellow square of light at the top.

"You do drive fast," said Doris.

She had not spoken during the drive. Jim had glanced at her once to find that her eyes were shut. He had hoped that she was sleeping. The blue light of an arc lamp had fallen on her face and he fancied he saw tears on her cheek. He passed the lamp too fast to be sure. It was a gloomy end to the day.

"Are you in such a hurry to say good-bye?" she asked.

Jim did not answer. From the lighted window at the top of the house came the thin notes of a violin.

"That's old Golub," said Doris. "He's a Russian."

"It's very sad, the tune he's playing."

They listened for a little while in silence.

"All his tunes are sad," said Doris. "He told me what that one is called. He wanted me to learn the words, but the title was enough. 'Soloviem zaletniom.' Did you ever?"

Jim asked what it meant. He wanted to postpone the moment of parting.

" 'Like a flying nightingale,' he told me."

"What is?"

"Being young, he said. What he calls Yout'. He can't pronounce 'th.' "

The music stopped. The lighted square disappeared.

"Every one has gone to bed," said Jim.

She nodded. Although it was dark, he was con-

scious of every movement she made, of the twining and untwining of her fingers, of the rise and fall of her breasts.

"Will Milly be there to let you in?" he asked, because he was afraid of silence.

"No." He had to bend forward to catch the words. "Milly is spending the night with her sister."

Jim made an effort.

"I must fly," he said with an attempt at lightness, "like the nightingale."

"I shall never see you again?" she asked in a flat voice.

"I suppose not."

He leant across to open the door of the saloon. He was careful not to touch her.

The air of the June night invaded the stuffiness of the closed car. It was warm on his cheek, and there must have been fields not far off, for it carried the smell of long grass. He resisted an impulse to slam the door and carry the frightened girl away from the cities of men as fast as the car could go, between high hedges, through dark villages, along white, winding roads up the sweep of the ageless downs. Before reason returned, to lift her out of the car and carry her in his arms through the silence and the sounds of night, across the immemorial turf where the first men in England lived and suffered and loved. . . .

The girl did not move and he had to squeeze past

her legs to reach the door. His knee knocked against hers.

"Good-bye!" he said, and held out his hand.

She did not take it. She reached up and caught the lapel of his coat. Her other hand fumbled at the back of his neck. He could feel the separate pressure of each burning finger. He did not resist as she drew his head down till it was level with her face. For a moment he looked into her dark, sad eyes. Then the lids fell, and she sank her mouth into his till his teeth must have cut her lips. Jim dropped to his knees and passed his arm round her body. She must have worn nothing under her jumper and he could feel every bone under its soft covering of flesh.

They stayed, face pressed against face and body to body, till breathing was difficult. Then Doris lay back in the seat.

"You're not going now?" she whispered.

Jim shook his head. He hoisted himself to his feet and out of the car. He stood by the door and waited for her to follow. Then hand-in-hand they hurried through the dark doorway.

PART II

"I did love this Bonville
Not as I ought, but as a woman might—
That's beyond reason."

JOHN WEBSTER

CHAPTER I

I

"THE old woman says there are owls that hoot in that tree at night," remarked Doris, waving her napkin at the sober foliage of an elm.

Jim bent to push a burnt-out match into the earth beside the green garden-chair.

"Do you like owls?" he asked.

"I've never heard one," said the girl. "There weren't any at Edgware. Will they keep us awake?"

It was Saturday and he had left his Chambers at noon. Doris had jumped into the car outside the Palace Theatre. In her hand was a despatch box that held, she told him, a nightdress and a toothbrush. The toothbrush might be a regulation pattern, but the nightdress was something out of the common.

"I don't know what the girl in the shop thought," she had recorded.

And now they were alone at a little inn buried in the Hertfordshire woods. The smooth lawn where they had eaten their luncheon was mottled with sunlight and shadow. When the mild air stirred the dreaming boughs, patches of light swam across the green table, their plates and their quiet hands, with the unhurrying precision of fish in a tank. Existence drowsed in the distant hum of flies. There was the snuffy smell of warm earth, the acrid odour of young

leaves. The countryside had surmounted the perplexity of spring and had not fallen under the disillusionment of summer.

"Happy?" asked Jim.

Doris looked round to see that the old woman who kept the inn was not in sight. She knelt on the ground to lay her cheek against his hand.

"Too happy!" she said. "I've read about this in books. Gardens and woods and a lover like you—I didn't think I'd ever have the luck!"

Jim saw a trim garden with green tables and chairs spaced at regular intervals on a well-mown lawn that was bordered with lobelia and marguerite. Beyond the fence the woods marshalled their mystery. Yes, the place was very pretty.

"Do you believe the things they put in books?" Doris was asking.

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, well! About love and all that."

Jim considered as he felt in his pockets for his pipe.

"I think that novelists," he said at last, "have to write up love a bit, just as journalists write up the Opening of Parliament. You see, their livings depend on it."

Doris's forehead puckered.

"Are you disappointed?" she asked humbly.

Jim felt guilty. Women are so literal.

"Good heavens, no! I was talking. You're the most adorable thing in the world."

He stroked her hair.

How lovely she was! How simply and happily she had surrendered herself to his love! He could still feel the impress of her sharp, passionate teeth on his lips. The freshness of her body lingered in his nostrils. He was amazed that he had so nearly allowed himself to lose her. Her adoration was touching and a little frightening.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, looking in his face.

He told her part.

"There isn't long till night!" she promised.

"Ages!" he protested.

Her eyes went sad.

"I wish there was. I wish Time would stop."

"Time won't," he said. "We must make the best of the old man while he's here."

Obediently, since Jim was wisdom made flesh, she asked how he wanted to spend the afternoon.

"What about the woods?" he suggested.

They strolled through the white gate at the foot of the garden. Under the interlacing boughs, the daylight was subdued—"Like in church," said Doris. Through the path that carpeted their steps young shoots of bracken had forced their way. Some were tightly curled like question marks; some had burst into feathers of green spray.

Doris picked her way with the delicacy of the town bred.

"Doesn't this belong to somebody?" she asked.

"To us," said Jim, and added, "for to-day and to-morrow."

Doris struggled with a thought.

"It'll always be ours," she corrected. "Nobody can take away what's happened."

"Nobody can alter that!" said Jim slowly.

She divined a different shade of meaning.

"You're not sorry?" she demanded in a low voice. "You don't hate me?"

He stopped her questioning, and perhaps his own, with a kiss.

"No one could help loving you," he told her.

"You were thinking of your wife," she guessed. "Is she very lovely?"

Jim did not answer.

"Is she prettier than me?" she persisted.

"You are both beautiful in different ways," he answered carefully.

"Well, think of me!" she commanded. "To-day, at least."

"I have," he said, "since the first moment I saw you!"

"That was fun," she laughed. "In that studio. Did you like me?"

Jim told her that he had wanted to kiss her. Without shame she said she wished he had—"and then perhaps you wouldn't have taken so long to make love to me!"

In the ardour of confession, she admitted that she

had allowed herself to be caught in the memorable game, because she thought he looked nice—"like Douglas Fairbanks."

"I never expected to meet you again. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw you at the baths." She broke off. "Did you like my bathing costume?"

A little stream babbled over the stones and plunged into the darkness of a bank of dog roses. She was enchanted by its mystery and drew him from the path to follow. Where the brook left the briars, its bed cut deep into the soft soil. The girl took off her shoes and stockings. Under the water her feet looked like sunk water-lilies. She waded for fifty yards and was happy in splashing her skirt and hurting her feet on the stones.

"Let's sit here and dry," she decided and until the water grew too cold she dangled a leg for the baby eddies to tickle. Then she curled up like a little cat with her head on her lover's lap. Jim sat upright, his back against a fallen alder. She told him of the sayings and doings of girl friends and their "boys." Her voice rippled pleasantly to an undercurrent of the small noises of the woods. Several times he lost track of the sense, but Doris was talking out of happiness and never noticed if her hero dozed. He was intermittently conscious that she was telling him about Madame Ducette's temper and that a green woodpecker was drumming on the resonant bole of an oak. It was good to be alive . . . good to fall

asleep . . . in an English wood . . . with a young head on your lap . . . a head as pretty as . . .

II

The sun was setting as they walked back to the inn. Its splendour filled the room, overcrowded with horsehair furniture, where they ate a meal of bacon and eggs. The pewter on the sideboard reflected the glow. So did the white apron of the landlady, who hovered in the background to ply them with bottles of tomato sauce.

Her presence restricted their talk.

Jim was hungry and called for a second helping; his companion ate little and seemed content to touch his knee whenever the old woman left them alone. Every time he looked up from the table he found her shining eyes on his movements. The worship of a deity or a brother mortal is about the best dodge *homo sapiens* has found to camouflage the vanity of existence. If only gods and heroes knew their trade!

At last the landlady took away the plates and Jim drew Doris to the window to watch the green die on the darkening horizon.

"Oh, Jim!" she sighed, "I never saw the sky before!"

He lit his pipe and knew that peace of the soul that falls where it is least deserved, proceeding, if Nietzsche is to be believed, "from the first presage of weariness or a feeling that the air is damp, or unconscious gratitude for a good digestion."

But Doris fidgeted. The sofa was hard and she wanted to explore the room. Jim had to strike a match to light the lamp. Only her face and hands were visible in the shadow that the lampshade spread. They hovered in the dusk, as she examined the wedding groups that covered the walls and the mementos collected on summer holidays. Some of the rarer specimens she carried to the sofa to show her lover.

Suddenly she dropped on the table a large mauve shell, disfigured with orange freckles.

"I'm going to bed," she announced.

Jim pulled out his watch and promised to follow when he had finished his pipe.

She lingered in the open doorway.

"Come with me," she pleaded. "It's so dark."

He picked up the lamp to light her to their room, but the wick was badly trimmed and a reddish flame licked the glass. He blew it out and felt his way to the door. For a moment he could not find Doris. The darkness had stolen her. Then he heard a board creak and quick breathing. His outstretched hand touched her neck. She gave a little gasp. He bent back her supple body and kissed her throat.

"She'll hear us," Doris protested faintly.

"Let her!" said Jim.

"She'll think it funny of us to go to bed at this hour."

Jim silenced her objections with another kiss.

With their fingers locked, they climbed the narrow

staircase. The landing window gave them a glimpse of the silver bow of a young moon. They fumbled for the door of their room. To avoid mistake, Jim struck a match on the uneven threshold. The sudden light picked out a point of brilliance where Doris's left hand rested on the side post. The flare was quickly gone, but she guessed that he had noticed.

"It saves questions," she explained. "I bought it in the Strand for a shilling. It isn't gold. It's brass!"

CHAPTER II

I

ALL Monday afternoon Jim was busy at the Temple writing a difficult opinion. He worked hard to cover the foolscap, for he had promised to meet Doris before the shops shut.

That morning she had risen early, and as he fixed his collar before the speckled mirror of the little inn's best bedroom, he saw her enter the garden by the white gate.

"Isn't breakfast ready?" he asked as she drifted into the room.

"I don't know. I had to see our path again."

He looked at her over his shoulder. She clutched his hand.

"Don't let's go back!" she begged. "Let's stay on. Just this week!"

He smiled and asked her what would happen to her job.

"I can get another. Anyhow, I don't care. I only want you!"

Gently, he reminded her of his own work, his own ties.

"I know I'm silly," she whispered, "but I'm so afraid."

Jim did not know what to say. Would the parting that was so inevitable be more painful than he had foreseen?

"You're not angry?" she asked anxiously, mistaking his silence. "I won't be any nuisance to you. But the time is so quickly gone."

"It will come again," he soothed her. "And we'll meet to-night. Would you like to dance somewhere?"

Her cares dropped away.

"Would I like?" she cried. "Don't make me laugh!"

Then her face clouded.

"I'll have to 'phone Olive."

Jim asked if her friend was to be asked.

"Oh no! She'd try to vamp you!"

"Then why?"

Doris hesitated.

"It's our evening frock," she explained. "To-night is her turn. Mondays she goes to the Hammersmith Palais."

Regretfully she submitted to immutable laws. Jim respected her gravity.

"We *could* go shopping," he suggested. "If Madame Ducette will let you out early."

Her look transfigured him. Here was a superman whose will could remove landmarks.

They met at a shop in Wardour Street, where she declared could be found frocks that the big houses farther West sold at double the price. Jim was glad to avoid the risk of meeting friends.

From behind a screen a Polish woman, buttoned to the chin in black satin, loomed into sight.

"Afternoon, Madame," began Doris. "We've come to buy an evening frock."

"A liddle evening frock," echoed the proprietress with approval. "I have jost the thing. Id will go with that beautiful 'air of yours. Id is a dream." She grasped a wisp of silver tissue over her fat arm. "For you I make id sevendeen pounds."

Doris grinned at Jim.

"It's you doing the dreaming," she retorted. "If that's worth thirteen, I'll go to the dance in my cami-knickers!"

"The stoff alone is worth thirdeen," sighed the Pole.

"I'd better tell you I'm in the trade," Doris stated with her nose in the air. "Then we'll know where we are."

"Fourdeen pound ten," suggested the woman persuasively.

"My friend may do the paying," admitted Doris, "but I do the choosing. And I'm not here to watch him robbed. See?"

"I onderstand." Her flesh wobbled with comprehension. "And when you have tried this model, you will say that at fourteen pound id is a present."

Doris took the dress from the plump hand and held it against her body.

"A present!" she echoed. "I wouldn't take it at

that! I'd need a guinea's worth of rouge to wear with this silver stuff!"

The foreigner asked meekly what colour of frock she had in mind.

"Pink!"

"I have some lovely liddle pink models. Jost your style. Jost your size——" she paused and added with a shade of meaning, "Madame."

While she routed in a tall cupboard with glass doors, Doris made Jim sit on a precarious gilt chair.

"Isn't it thrilling!" she whispered. "Of course, I knew that silver thing wouldn't do. I just wanted to get her on the go."

Jim understood that he was shown a new side of Doris. It was not unpleasant to watch the lamb ballyrag the wolf.

"I'll see she doesn't do you," she promised. "They always try it on when there's a man to pay."

Amused, he sat for half an hour and saw her handle, compare and discard pale pink bunches of silk, lace and taffeta. At last the Pole, armed with the patience that the centuries have taught her race, lured her with an armful of frocks into the fitting room. Five minutes later Doris's bare head poked its wide parting round the door.

"Jim, you must come and see!" she called.

Self-consciously, he strolled into the space partitioned from the shop. In the middle of the floor, under a cluster of electric lights, a tall mirror in the

shape of a triptych reflected from a dozen angles a dozen bewildering and desirable visions. High-heeled shoes, gun-metal stockings, rose-coloured georgette and ribbons, a bare chest and slim arms that struggled in a froth of pale silk were multiplied indefinitely. The Slav, looking like a priestess at a Black Mass, nodded ponderously to Jim.

"Whad a figure she has!" she wheezed. "When I was fourdeen . . ."

Doris gave a shrug and a wiggle, and the dress fell into place.

"What do you think?" she asked, leaning forward and gazing in the glass. "Of course, the shoes and stockings are all wrong . . ."

With befitting gravity Jim advised her to try the other frocks before she made up her mind.

"I think this will do," said Doris firmly. "The *rose du Barri* is wicked!"

"Jost to see!" urged the priestess. "You need not buy id."

She helped the willing girl out of the dress she was wearing and into a second that had hung over the mirror like a trail of exotic creeper. Rather high at the neck, as if jealous of her charms, it seemed to clasp her body in a loving silken embrace. From the waist it floated reluctantly outwards, to die away in a flutter of *tulle*. Doris stared into the glass with parted lips.

"It's lovely," she murmured, "but it's too dear."

"How much?" asked Jim.

"No," she decided, "I like the other just as well. And it costs half."

" 'My Rose' is a very preddy model," put in the Pole without enthusiasm, "but nod in the same sdreed with 'Charmain.' "

"It's just what I want," said Doris stoutly. "If eight pounds isn't too much, Jim dear?"

Jim drew out a handful of notes.

"We'll take the two!" he decreed.

II

But "Charmain's" length needed alteration and the night's dancing was put off. Jim was not sorry to arrange a quiet dinner in Soho and an early return to their beds.

"Does Milly know?" he asked, as they walked through the narrow streets that led from the dressmaker to a little restaurant he had found.

"I think she's guessed," was the answer. "Does it matter?"

Jim shook his head.

"She doesn't like me," he said.

"She doesn't like men," Doris explained. "She says they're only out for one thing. That isn't true, is it?"

Jim tried to give an honest answer.

"I think men are at their worst with women," he declared, and then qualified his judgment. "When they are not at their best."

"You'd never treat a girl badly," was her comment. "Not one that was fond of you."

"Treat a girl badly." He hoped he would not. But what exactly did the phrase mean? There was no danger that he would ever be unkind to Doris, not on purpose. But if she minded when the time came. . . .?

They turned into a side street. Two lines of torn paper and sucked fruit revealed where the row of stalls had stood.

"How did Milly get on with Tring?" Jim asked.

"Fine!" said Doris. "At least, she did at first. And then she thought she'd like to visit the Hall of Mirrors and Mr. Tring said he didn't want to see his grey hair in a glass and so he paid for her and when she came out she couldn't find him anywhere."

Jim was not surprised. No dilemma had horns sharp enough to transfix that astute old man.

"Milly says he did it on purpose. But she didn't mind, for she met another gentleman, much younger, in the Hall of Mirrors and he took her back to London on his carrier. Only he got fresh and she had to smack his face."

Doris stopped to gaze in the lighted window of a furrier's shop where stoles with vicious little heads hung in unforgiving bunches.

"I never had a present like yours," she remarked.

"A small enough return," replied Jim.

At first she did not understand his meaning.

"Oh, that!" she murmured. "I wish there was more to give."

She slipped her hand through his arm and they walked a short way without talking.

"You make me a little ashamed," he whispered.

III

Next night after dinner they took a taxi to the Half Moon Club. John Tring had mentioned it as a lively place, and not frequented by "anybody one knows." It was less boring, he had alleged, than the grimly respectable places where a man takes his wife or his friend's wife.

"What name shall I put?" asked the prognathous doorkeeper.

Jim hesitated.

"It needn't be your own, sir," the man went on. "Mr. Clutterwiggin of the Royal Automobile? Very good, sir. Not that we're likely to see the police tonight."

Mr. Clutterwiggin and partner passed smiling to an iron table where a girl in a black dress tilted her chair. A rapid glance took in Jim's tail-coat and Doris's new frock.

"A guinea each," said the young woman dispassionately.

Jim raised his eyebrows.

"Toss you double or quits!" he offered.

She hitched a shoulder strap.

"Right!" she said, and lost.

Jim walked through the double doors in that glow of satisfaction that money ill-earned kindles. Doris looked up happily into his face.

"I told you you were wonderful!" she whispered.

For the moment Jim thought so too.

"The Half Moon," he remarked, "seems to be full!"

His jest was not far from the truth. The centre of the room was crowded with couples dancing, the edges lined with couples drinking. A waiter slid up to them with the apology that there was one table left. If the lady did not mind being near the band. . . .

Over the top of the piano beamed the bald head of the pianist. He was playing softly for his own pleasure and his head bounced a little as he struck the notes. The face widened to the bottom and was punctuated by the stump of a cigar clamped between gold-crowned teeth.

"He thinks he's found the Lost Chord!" whispered Doris.

At the next table a group of girls chattered, yawned and repaired their make-up. From the scraps of their conversation that reached his ears, Jim guessed that they were dancing partners.

"Can he dance?" asked rhetorically a blonde, fiddling with the imitation ermine of her dress. "Not so as you'd notice."

"He's young, anyhow." A Spanish-looking girl

who needed depilatory treatment sucked a chocolate. "You should hear the bones of my one creak. One foot in the grave and the other on my toes!"

Doris's elbow caught Jim's ribs.

"What are you looking at?" she asked jealously.

"Their legs," was Jim's answer. "I was wondering if they were very flesh-coloured stockings. . . ."

A tall figure stopped at the table and a melodious voice completed the sentence.

"Or very stocking-coloured flesh!"

Jim looked up to meet the blue, amused eyes of John Tring.

"Good-evening, Miss Lea. What a lovely dress!" The little lines at the corner of his eye puckered and Jim guessed that "Charmain's" probable source had not escaped him. "How is Miss Miles? I was so sorry to lose her at Epsom."

"Damn the old busybody!" thought Jim, and regretted his choice of a night club. It was true that the old man did not move in the circle of his friends, but scandal, he knew, was his life-blood. What John Tring saw to-day, England heard to-morrow.

"Do you mind if I sit with you?" he was asking. "There doesn't seem to be another table."

It was wise to make friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness, and Jim welcomed him with all the warmth he could muster.

"Do any good at Epsom?" he asked.

"I haven't done any good at Epsom," said John Tring, "since nineteen hundred and twenty-six. Then

I was able to remind the bookmaker that kind hearts are more than Coronachs."

His reminiscence was drowned by the band. Beyond the bald pianist, a native of Africa as black as a stove rolled from side to side in the ecstasy of coaxing syncopated rhythm from his drums. On the edge of the platform a fiddler with long, sleek hair and an olive complexion seemed to toss the melody at the dancers in little drops of sound that pattered off the end of his brow. Behind him a half-caste moaned it down a saxophone. A lean man with horn-rimmed spectacles twitched it from a banjo. A bull-necked man brayed it through a trombone.

Ever and again the half-caste stopped to give a high-pitched laugh that was nearer a neigh. The banjoist's strong white teeth were set in a strong white smile that was probably as false as they. To lighten the banality of evening dress, each of the musicians except the pianist, who flaunted his baldness like a banner, wore a golden bowler hat.

"That hat," said Tring leaning forward, "is the symbol of the place. The clay of daily life transmuted into the gilt of Romance."

Jim laughed. It was rather pleasant to listen again to the old man's flippancies.

"Alternatively," continued Tring, "it is the hallmark of a century which rises to gold, but cannot soar above bowler hats!"

Doris caught Jim's eye and looked puzzled. Dishonest John intercepted the glance. He turned his

attention to the girl. Did she, he inquired, like the Half Moon?

"I think it's lovely. I like it better than the Wimbledon Palais," was her reply.

"A night club should be a night club," Tring maintained without a smile. "Not a travesty of the Athenæum."

"Do you belong to the Athe—what is it?" asked Doris timidly.

"Me? Good God, no! With all my failings I'm not a judge or a bishop."

Jim looked at his watch and asked if they could get wine.

"All night," said Tring, "in jugs. To placate Vine Street or to embody the British spirit of compromise, who knows? Shall I order?"

He beckoned a waiter, who set a vessel on the table.

"Half-an-hour ago," the old man declared, as he filled the glasses, "this was Asti at six shillings a bottle. Now, by the touch of Romance's wand and the simple process of decanting, it is Mumm at fifty-five shillings!"

"One can't complain after midnight," said Jim, tasting it.

Tring set down his glass with a grimace.

"We have the consolation," he remarked philosophically, "of knowing that the free citizens of the greatest republic in the world are drinking distillations even nastier."

His attention was diverted to the leader of the band. He had hopped off the platform and, still playing his fiddle, threaded his way in and out of the dancers. With head thrown back, blue throat taut and eyes half-closed, he spun like a humming-top while his feet twinkled merrily in a deft little step. The band played under its breath. Dancers stopped to watch him and drinkers to applaud him. His place on the platform was taken by a tall visitor, amiably drunk, who conducted the orchestra with a long black cigar. . . .

"What about a dance?" said Jim to Doris.

Although her smooth head only reached half-way up his shirt front, he knew at once that she was a beautiful dancer. She seemed to float in his arms. The levitation of the spiritualists, he guessed, must give that feeling.

They left Tring talking over his shoulder to the girl with ermine on her frock. Doris lifted her eyes.

"He's amusing," she murmured, "isn't he?"

Jim agreed.

"I don't understand a quarter he says!" she confessed and added quickly, "Do you find me dull?"

Jim vowed he found her adorable. After all, you don't choose a bedfellow for her conversation.

"You looked cross when he came up," she persisted.

To explain his frown he sketched Tring's character.

"He won't tell your wife?" she asked.

Jim shook his head without speaking. He had surrendered himself to the rhythm of the dance. The

lightness of his partner's steps seemed to etherealise his heavier tread. She carried him with her until they floated like driftwood on a buoyant ocean. As long as he danced with Doris, he need not descend to consideration of danger or duty. Under the spell that her rhythmical little body cast over his senses, how easily life seemed to flow; easy and silky and smooth, sparing the fantasy of dreaming, the cruelty of living. He had known this peace, this sweep on lazy wings through the mild lower air at the moment between sleep and waking . . .

Somebody blew a whistle and the music stopped at a discord. The only sound was a woman's half-hysterical laughter. A tall man in a dinner jacket jumped on the stage and held up his hand.

"Will everybody please take their seats!"

The buzz of talk was released as the centre of the room cleared. Jim could see that the double doors were manned by a constable in uniform.

"Police raid!" said Doris, nervously delighted.

The constable opened the doors to a string of plain-clothes detectives. A pompous man in a white waistcoat began to expostulate with the inspector on the stage. His face was familiar from the picture press.

Tring, who had not moved, gave a nod in his direction.

"This will take a bit of explaining to his nonconformist constituents," he remarked.

Jim reflected that not only cabinet ministers might find a difficulty in explaining. He was aware that Tring and Doris expected him to be amused at the mischance. He was unable to summon any mirth. If his name were taken, what might not be printed in the newspapers?

The inspector had summoned the proprietor of the club. Tring commented that the name of Macgregor, which he overheard, suggested a later civilisation than the curly hair and pendulous nose. Doris wanted to go on dancing.

"Why are they doing this?" she asked plaintively. "It was lovely before."

"Someone," said John Tring, "has blundered. I always understood that Vine Street had a regular tariff. Perhaps our Scotch friend is behindhand in his instalments, or possibly the old firm of Ingram, Jix and Grundy have had an orgasm."

Jim felt foolish. A party of detectives were making a round of the room. At each table they stopped and smelt the contents of the glasses. Then they wrote in little books. Would it be safe to give a false name? Mr. Clutterwiggin of the R. A. C.! He supposed Doris would like him to make a jest of their situation. But that would never do. The worst policy was to attract attention. Already the detectives were two tables nearer.

"What a farce this all is!" he exclaimed angrily.

Tring leaned forward.

"My dear fellow!" His tone was kind. "I do believe you are irritated. I always find the stirrings of the official conscience so refreshing."

"So might I," retorted Jim. "If I were not married. Or had brought my own wife."

"I did not understand," said Tring. "You see I have not the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Warlock. Surely she would not take this harlequinade *au grand sérieux!*"

The plain-clothes men were three tables away. Jim shrugged his shoulders gloomily.

"I think I understand." Tring was playing with the table lamp. He looked up and remarked irrelevantly that he wondered where that door led.

"To jug!" said Jim sourly. There would be a policeman at every entrance.

"That little door under the stage about three feet from your chair," was the elder's retort. "Now, if Miss Lea and you slipped through there . . ."

"The police would see us," concluded Jim. Certainly Tring was very old.

"Not necessarily!" An impish smile was lighting the clear blue eyes. "Not necessarily!" he repeated and asked quickly, "Are you ready?"

The hand that was playing with the base of the standard lamp crept up the stem. As if in absence of mind, it untwisted the globe from the socket. The long fingers of the left hand were twiddling into a ball a piece of tinfoil off a chocolate that Doris had eaten.

"Go!" said Tring and tossed the ball into the socket of the lamp to nestle between the terminals. There was a blue flash and the room was in darkness. When the police had found their torches, John Tring was the amused and only occupant of the table by the band.

CHAPTER III

I

THE basket chair creaked as Jim leaned back to watch Doris bend over the kettle and the gas ring.

The little flat at Edgware should have seemed a haven of peace and security after last night's escape through the bowels of the Half Moon Club. Milly was at the Pictures and Doris had begged him to spend a few hours as if, she had said, they were in their own place.

He wondered if a woman has always the instinct to bind a man to her with ties of comfort and home.

Doris left the kettle and squatted on the hearth-rug. With an old glove on her hand, she began to do things with lumps of coal and bits of stick.

Jim urged her not to bother with a fire.

"I'm terrified you'll catch cold," she said. "Let me look after you to-night. I don't often get the chance."

"I'm giving so much trouble."

"Trouble!" she cried. "Wouldn't I just love to look after you always?"

His conscience stirred in its sleep. Taking a girl to night clubs, dressmakers, even to bed might not mean very much. If she started to mother you and to try to make a home, she must be taking the game

pretty seriously. Infidelity went deeper if a woman was allowed to usurp the duties of a wife as well as the pleasures of a mistress.

"Suppose you fell ill!" she was saying. "That's what frightens me. I couldn't come and nurse you, could I?"

He shook his head.

"I mightn't even know! I'm miserable when I think."

The kettle began to boil and her attention turned to mixing hot water, cocoa powder and condensed milk. She brought him the cup and sat on the arm of his chair.

"Isn't it fun?" she exclaimed. "Why can't we always do this?"

Jim knew he was ungrateful to visualise an infinite row of cups of hot cocoa and asthmatic basket chairs. He could not put much warmth into his nod. Perhaps she noticed.

"When does your wife come home?" She took his cup.

He told her that Clemency had taken Gorla abroad for a fortnight or more. Ten days were up.

"And when she's back?" whispered Doris.

That was a question Jim had begun to ask. Not that Doris's power over his senses was on the wane. In her old green frock she seemed no less desirable than the day he had brought her back from Farmers' Green. But the raid at the Half Moon had forced open his reluctant eyes to the slipperiness of the slope.

After the first blind moment outside the terra-cotta doorway, when his familiar world went up in smoke and flame, he had not allowed himself to reflect. But on the mornings that Clemency's letters came and his answers were written, his conscience was apt to give a little trouble.

He quieted it and said that the pleasure he took in Doris did no harm to Clemency, since she would never know. Nor was his affection for her touched, for that was set too deep to be accessible to the effervescence of sense.

But now the entrance of his fool's paradise was guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. Two angels, rather. One wore the slightly antiquated dress suit of the scandal-loving Tring, the other the blue helmet of the Vine Street police. It was idle to pretend that there was no danger of his secret coming to Clemency's ears.

But Doris was repeating her question.

"When she's back?" he echoed. "Can't we leave that?"

He felt her body gather itself as if for a leap.

"It isn't as if you were fond of her," she said.

Jim was silent. How could he explain to the girl on the arm of his chair the love he felt for his wife, which, according to every idea that women hold, he had renounced in her arms? That was cruel to Doris and what would be the good?

She seemed to guess part of his thoughts.

"You won't give me up, Jim? You couldn't."

He looked into her eyes dark with anxiety. He knew he could make her understand no better than he could Clemency.

"I couldn't do without you now," she whispered. She slid off the arm of his chair to the floor and rested her elbows on his knees. Her enormous eyes searched his face.

"I know you," she said. "Better than you think. I know you wouldn't have the heart."

Jim took the lovely face between his hands.

"When I look at you," he declared, "it seems impossible."

"Your wife will never know," she whispered. "We're doing her no harm. And you'd kill me if you went."

Jim's mood changed. He found it pitiful that men should torture themselves and each other. Why not accept, with a humility that may hope to placate a jealous God, the occasional moments when body can give mind oblivion, if not happiness?

"I'm a brute," he said, "to plague you."

"You're a darling," she contradicted and laid her dark head against his leg.

II

Time stood still and the alarm clock on the mantelpiece had stopped. There was the click of a latchkey in the front door.

"Milly said she wouldn't be back till eleven," said Doris and shook the creases out of her frock.

Jim pulled out his watch.

"It's nearly twelve!" he announced.

Milly's *béret* sailed into the room and landed on the bamboo table.

"My!" she exclaimed when she saw Jim, "Valentino also ran!"

A little stiffly, Jim asked her if the Picture had been good.

"Romeo and Juliet," she replied. "You two should see it. Too soppy for me."

Doris explained that Milly liked the comics best. Milly nodded.

"That's right. Safety First was my maiden name. A custard pie never got a girl into trouble."

Doris remarked that she did say things.

"Yes, but I stop at saying," she retorted. Her sense of fairness compelled her to add, "Not that I get the chances you do. With a face like mine, a girl don't need any front wheel brakes."

Jim looked again at his watch.

"I must go," he exclaimed.

"To-day's Great Thought!" said Milly without pity.

Doris told her to shut up and offered to walk with Jim to the garage. She went to the bedroom for her hat.

"See here!" snapped Milly as the door shut. "You listen to me. Keep your foot *off* the soft, soft pedal. That's a queer kid. She takes things seriously. Even men."

Jim wondered if there were not some wisdom in Milly's words. But they came late. He answered that he would see that Doris met no harm. Miss Miles did not seem convinced.

"I shouldn't wonder if she met it when she met you," she began, but the subject of her anxiety was at the door.

"Milly trying to get off with you?" she asked Jim lightly.

The red-haired girl laughed offensively.

"I like 'em single!" she said.

On their way to the garage Doris apologised for her friend.

"She's very fond of you," said Jim.

"You are too?" she asked anxiously. "It isn't just——?"

"Of course I am," he replied. "And who knows where love starts and stops?"

They walked the rest of the short distance without speaking. When they reached the illuminated sign, she asked about to-morrow's meeting place. Jim hesitated. He felt the need for some hard thinking out of reach of enchantment.

"I can't to-morrow," he said slowly.

"Oh!" Her voice had dropped a semitone. "Next day then?"

He felt as if he had cheated a child out of a party.

"All right!" he capitulated. "Friday, outside the Palace, at six."

CHAPTER IV

I

JIM fiddled with his latchkey, and avoided the dolphin's raffish eye. Since the scare at the night club the knocker had taken a look of John Tring. To-night, as the door shut softly, it gave a little tap on the plate as if demanding admission to its master's secrets.

On the hall table lay a thin paper envelope with a dark blue stamp. Jim carried it to the drawing-room.

"My dear," he read in Clemency's clear hand. "You were right as usual. Aix has done the trick. The wedding is to be at St. Margaret's next month. Gorla has written to the parachutist that she can never forget him, but she wouldn't like her children to lose their father so young. You'll appreciate Vincent. He's clean-looking, normal, and as near a gentleman as one finds. I'm bringing them back to England before they change their minds. London with the *Morning Post* makes an engagement so much more irreparable, doesn't it? So expect us on Thursday. It will be ripping to see you again. These ten days have seemed long . . ."

Jim read the letter slowly. He knew that he ought to feel pleasure that he was so soon to see Clemency,

and relief that Gorla's vagaries had found a happy issue. The best thing that could happen to her was a marriage to a decent chap. In marriage she would find a steadying influence.

But while he forced his mind to absorb the good news the letter had brought, he recognised a feeling in the pit of his stomach familiar to his school days. Clemency was coming back to-morrow. He would have to look into her cool grey eyes and lie to her, kiss her clean lips with all Iscariot's fervour. She would ask a hundred well-meant questions about his employments which he would have to parry, recall in her caresses his mistress's love-making.

John Tring might say that a mistress and a wife should be kept in watertight compartments, each with a set of rules and emotions. The old man came of a more robust generation.

Clemency's eyes grew larger and darker until Doris stood pleading in her place. Longing, he knew, for her youth and loveliness would swoop again on his unguarded heart. Worse, she had shown him that her happiness lay in his maladroit hands. How could he smash it? Had he not a sort of inverted duty to enter on a routine of deception?

If that was his duty, could his solid love for Clemency survive? Passion, he had read somewhere, was the flower of love. Flowers fade and die. But passion, if it was helped by kindness and understanding, might be luckier. It might be transmuted into something for which the reticent English tongue has

not found a name. Devotion, tenderness, affection play their share. Nine years of marriage had transmuted the passion that Jim had once felt for Clemency into this fruit of love. And now, like a child, he had happened on a new flower. Its smell and colour had excited him. At such moments he told himself—for even the memory of beauty is perishable—that this was as lovely as the blossom which Clemency and he had found nine years ago . . . It might be lovely; he knew it was condemned to sterility.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck a single, silvery note. Jim glanced at it. He had never remarked the figures that supported the dial. Dresden, he supposed they were. In the centre, with crossed legs, stood a shepherd, a three-cornered hat on his curls and bows of ribbon at his knees. On his left arm a shepherdess, crook in hand, swayed towards him and held her painted lips to be kissed. On his right arm swooned a *marquise,* her open fan guarding her painted cheek. Between them the shepherd played placidly on his pipe.

Jim envied his detachment. In his place he would have broken the flute across his knee and flung it through the window.

II

The bad quarter-hours of life are usually worse in expectation than in endurance, and the first mo-

ments of his meeting with Clemency were not the ordeal he had feared. In his real pleasure at seeing her, the cloud on his horizon shrank to the size of a woman's hand.

He had come back early from the Temple to find Clemency and Gorla in the hall.

"How lovely you're looking!" The words were surprised out of him as he kissed her cool cheek.

"J-Jim dear!" she said, and gripped his hands.

"Aren't I looking lovely, too?" demanded Gorla.

"You've got a young man of your own," retorted Jim, "to tell you that. Where is he?"

"At Victoria," she explained. "The Customs. If it wasn't for luggage, I wonder how many women would marry?"

Clemency led him into the drawing-room.

"You're looking well," she decided. "Rather thin. Has Mrs. Woods fed you properly?"

"I haven't given her much chance; I've been out to dinner most nights."

"Your club?"

"I've been there a good deal."

He comforted himself that there had been a foundation of truth to his lie.

"I hope you've had a decent time," she said.

He avoided an answer.

"What was Aix like?" he asked.

"Amusing enough, if you could have come."

"That would have been fun." He walked to the

window. "What's-her-name won't remember to water the geraniums."

"I'll get everything right to-morrow," she promised with a laugh. "You must have forgotten what it's like to have a wife."

Jim looked up quickly. But she was placidly straightening a cushion.

"Did you like that print? The prize fight?" she asked.

How ungrateful he was! He had forgotten her present.

"That was sweet of you. I haven't had it hung yet."

"We'll choose a place," she looked round the room. "How good to be home!"

He asked about her hotel and her journey. She admitted that the train had been hot.

"I think I'll have a bath."

His relief was shattered by her next words.

"Won't you come and talk to me afterwards?"

That he could not endure. He knew that if he were alone with her a moment longer, the truth would pour out.

"Oughtn't you to rest?" he urged.

Her lips were forming into a protest that she was not tired.

"And I must write a letter for the post," he lied. He rose and held open the door. She hesitated on the threshold and seemed about to speak. Did she guess?

III

At dinner Gorla and Vincent helped to ease the strain. Vincent proved to be a fleshy young man of twenty-four, with a nice smile and sandy hair. Besides Gorla, his chief interest in life seemed to be his Bentley. Jim could only suppose that a surfeit of cubists and parachutists had turned for Gorla the normal into the ideal.

He talked fast to her in the hope that Clemency would not notice his neglect.

"How did it happen?" Gorla's laugh filled the air. "Jim, aren't you deliciously Victorian!"

"Even under George V," said Jim, "I suppose there are a few preliminaries?"

"I always said your hard exterior hid a romantic heart," she retorted.

"It was romantic, sir," said Vincent, and brought Jim's hairs a yard or two nearer the grave. "Jolly romantic! You see, I was tuning up my four and a half litre Bentley and doing a bit of fine work on the carburettor. Now, you probably know how the induction pipe goes . . ."

He began to make a diagram with pieces of bread.

"Cut it out, Vincent," interrupted Gorla. "What he's trying to tell you, Jim, is that he dropped a bit of the carburettor——"

"A jet," interposed her *fiancé*.

"Where he couldn't reach it," resumed Gorla. "I

walked past, and though I'd never set eyes on the man——"

Vincent was stung to protest.

"You'd smiled at him in the Casino!"

"He had the nerve," Gorla swept on, "to ask if I could get my hand in and fish out his jet."

"You see," enlarged Vincent, "I'd noticed, when she staked her money, what a small hand she had and I thought that it would be just the thing——"

"It struck you," said Clemency, "that if you married, the hand would always be there to fish out your jets. I'm beginning to see, Jim, what a bad wife I've been!"

This was the first time she had spoken since they had sat down. Jim had to remark the clear beauty of her voice. Gorla's was strident in comparison.

"Keep her up to her work on the drive to Sussex," she advised Vincent.

Jim remembered that there was much he wanted to hear. He asked how Sir George had taken the engagement. Clemency told him that her father had not had time to answer.

"Before we start," Gorla addressed her, "don't let me forget to ground Vincent on fish meal. Father nearly bit poor Tristram because he didn't know the proper ration for a pig."

Clemency, thought Jim, was the only one of the family with tact enough to handle the old man.

"From Hurston," went on Gorla, "Vincent is taking me for his family to vet. He has seven aunts,

all given to good works. O death, where is thy sting?"

Vincent started to defend his relations—one of whom, it appeared, had an awfully jolly Isotta touring car—and Clemency had a chance to speak to Jim.

"It's serious this time," she murmured. "She's quite changed. She does whatever he wants."

Jim asked if this devotion would last.

"Women stay devoted as long as men let them," Clemency thought. "And Vincent looks the sort."

Jim wondered if it was possible to recognise the sorts.

"Oh, yes! He's got that safe look. That's what women want in a husband. A lover has to be a dasher to be worth the trouble, but security is the husband's suit."

Jim busied himself with his salad before he asked, "Is that all a wife wants?"

"No. But it makes her patient with the average shortcomings of the average husband."

Jim raised his eyebrows. "Does anyone believe they own the average?"

"In husbands, yes. Not me. I've drawn lucky." She smiled at him. "But think how foul it would be not to trust your husband! Every time you went away, to wonder who he was with. And whether he *ever* told you the truth . . ."

Jim protested. How women tortured themselves!

"And it can't be much fun looking round your table and speculating which of your friends know." Clemency put butter on her *toast Melba.*

"There's a serial running in one of the picture papers," she said with a little laugh. "It's hero is a cowboy called 'Trueman Rock.' That's the stuff to give us. A man may combine the various qualities of Mr. Gladstone, St. Paul and Ronald Colman; unless he's reliable, his wife's best hope is the Admiralty, Probate and Divorce Court."

Before Jim had had time to think this over, Gorla's voice interposed.

"What's all this heart-to-heart stuff?" she called. "Are you breaking it to Jim that there's to be a patter of little feet, or what?"

"Or what," Clemency had recovered her usual detachment. "If you want to know, dear, we were discussing how long Vincent would stay faithful!"

"Till death us do part," declared Gorla brightly. "Or until he finds someone with a smaller hand!"

IV

Jim was smoking a final pipe before he went to bed. The library seemed very quiet. Gorla had dragged Vincent, who would have preferred to tell Jim about his car, to the Embassy Club. Clemency had retired to her bedroom. There was no sound but the pulse of an old clock that stood in the corner of the room and the sibilance of Jim's pipe that needed cleaning. Occasionally a motor horn would bleat in the distance. Once the flat tread of a policeman on his beat passed the house. Through the open window,

whose blind Jim had raised to profit by any breeze that stirred, came the click of an area gate. A little whispering and a giggle. Then a bass and a treble "Good-night." Somebody's housemaid had had her night out.

Silence closed in and the old house seemed to breathe easily in its sleep. Jim remembered a theory he had played with before he had grown to the materialism of manhood. He used to wonder if inhabited places were really insentient. The theatres where the generations of men perform their ten-minute turns of birth and bustle and death might well be indifferent to the spectacle—less probably unconscious. A step further and he used to fancy that the men who seem to drive their busy and indispensable ways through life were only the dreams—more or less bad—of the old hills and houses and valleys they inhabit. To-night he wished for the comfort of this theory. Might all his uncertainty and foreboding only pursue an uneasy existence across the sleep-drowned imagination of the wise old house!

Somewhere upstairs he heard the sash of a window slide in its frame. From where he sat he could see a light oblong reflected on the wall of the house across the road. The window was Clemency's, and hers the shadow that crossed the rectangle of light.

She had left a couple of French novels on the table by his chair, and though the authors' names were unfamiliar, the yellow covers held a lure. From an

unknown source a bowl of roses had appeared on the bookcase, and there were some interesting little sandwiches on the tray with the whisky.

There had been, he remembered, a time—was it only a fortnight ago?—when his heart had criticised the orderliness of Clemency's rule, and complained that middle age was brought to his door before his time. Well, he had had a taste of Bohemia and unconventionality. He remembered a piece of Italian brocade draping a divan in Hubert Dubb's studio that had slipped to reveal the squalor of an unmade bed. On another and more intimate occasion, Doris had asked him to fetch a pair of shoes from her cupboard. He had opened it to find them buried under a heap of dirty linen. Then there had been a face-towel smeared with old make-up. . . .

The flat at Edgware seemed very poor, very makeshift and shadowy as Jim settled himself into his comfortable leather chair and let his eyes rest on the rows of calf binding that reached the ceiling. Clemency had come back to set this ordinary, orderly existence in motion once again, as if there had never been a break.

He had promised to meet Doris the next evening. He would have to warn her of the changed situation. . . .

And while he made his plans for the morrow, he remembered a subject which he must discuss with Clemency. He knocked out the dottle of his pipe, shut the window and made his way upstairs.

V

In answer to Jim's tap Clemency looked over her shoulder and smiled. She was wearing a wrapper of washing silk with a pattern of bright flowers in bunches. Her bare arm was raised to pull a comb through her short, smooth hair. The light of the electric lamp over her head fell on the dressing table with its cool rows of bottles on either side of the glass.

"Are you too sleepy to talk?" asked Jim.

She shook her fair head and seemed to take a long time to find the right place for her comb on the dressing table. Then she turned on the stool to face him.

"There was something I ought to have written to you," he began.

She did not answer. He noticed that her hands clasped on her lap.

"N-need you tell me?"

"Why, yes!" he answered. "I think I ought to."

"Oh Jim!" she breathed. "I was so sure that I couldn't be right. . . ."

He tried to retrieve his blunder.

"Don't worry," he reassured her, "those dud oil shares of yours. I'm sure there's dirty work. I'll see Maine to-morrow and tell him what you want to do——"

He broke off. Clemency had turned away and was laughing.

"What's the joke?" he asked and raised her face

with his hand. He saw that her eyes were wet and he could not be sure whether she had laughed or cried.

"Nothing," she assured him.

He pressed her to say what was wrong.

"Nothing," she repeated and then the words came with a rush.

"I'm so ashamed. You know I t-trust you—oh! absolutely. But to-night you were so funny . . ."

"Was I?" asked Jim.

"Yes. And then you came in all solemn and said there was something . . . Oh Jim! For a second I thought that you had . . . And when you told me it was only those damned shares, I was so happy I lost hold!"

Jim searched for words. He contented himself with patting her shoulder.

"You're tired after your journey," he murmured. "Do get to bed. We won't bother about business to-night."

She vowed that she could not sleep and that it would rest her mind to settle the matter of the oil shares. He sat down on her bed and for ten minutes they discussed a way to cut her losses.

"Right!" he nodded at last. "Now I know what you want."

On his way to the door he stopped and lightly touched her arm. How fresh and cool her skin was! She lifted her face and he kissed her lips. He tried to say with his kiss how much, in spite of everything, he loved her. He wanted to stay with her and he guessed

that there was no surer way to dispel her doubts. But a sense of decency stopped him. He gave her arm a squeeze and walked to the door that connected their rooms. Her answering "Good-night" reached him after a slight pause.

VI

Although he had not dared to hope for its charity, sleep came quickly. It could not have been profound, for a slight noise woke him.

"Are you all right?" he called quietly.

There was no answer, but his affection for Clemency drew him into her room. He found her asleep, with the lamp burning by her bedside. A book had fallen to the floor. He picked it up. It was the biography of a minor Victorian statesman. She must have been reading to capture sleep. He glanced at the clock. Half-past two. If the book had just slipped from her hand, the statesman had been slow to exert his spell.

He turned to the bed and his heart ached to see how pale she looked. Her hair glistened in the lamplight. Her arm hung over the edge of the bed. He wanted to kiss it but was afraid to wake her.

Suddenly all his doubt and anxiety dropped from him. He had only to wake her and confess what he had done while she was away. He was almost sure she would forgive him. If she did not, he would at least feel clean.

He touched her shoulder. She was exhausted and she did not move. He was about to give her a little

shake when thought intervened. Had he the right to push off his burden on her? Ought he not to solve this tangle alone without dragging her into its misery? He saw the weakness and the unfairness of confession. Confession only shifted the unhappiness from his shoulders to Clemency's.

His hand fell to his side. Clemency might be pitiful with him. Would she show the same mercy to Doris?

He put out her reading lamp and went quietly back to his room. The moment that might have averted tragedy passed.

CHAPTER V

I

JIM was late for his rendezvous with Doris. As he hurried up the spacious squalor of the Charing Cross Road, he saw a slim figure in a vivid red raincoat waiting on the edge of the pavement.

"Oh!" said Doris. "I thought something had happened."

He began to apologise. She did not listen to what he said, but tried to read his face.

"What is it?" she asked fearfully. "You look different."

He told her that his wife had come back earlier than he had expected.

"Is that all?" she asked quickly. "I was afraid there was something worse."

He saw that he must speak at once. He tried to find a phrase that would not wound.

"I don't think that we will be able to see so much of each other," he said carefully. She looked so miserable that he added: "For a time at least."

"But sometimes you can be kept at the office," she pleaded.

He shrugged his shoulders. Was their love to bear the brand of the comic papers?

"We can't talk here," he stated. "In the street. Where shall we go?"

Doris said she had meant to suggest the Dirt Track, but now she supposed his wife would expect him to dinner. He nodded.

"Here's a cinema. It'll be quiet inside."

Doris smiled.

"It'll be dark," she said.

While he was paying, she wandered round the vestibule examining the "stills" framed on the walls.

"Clara Bow," she read. "I think she's sweet. Did you see 'Rough-house Rosie'? I laughed till I cried."

An attendant in a uniform from a Balkan Court held up a curtain and they passed into the dark, silent building. As the flashlight of the *ouvreuse* guided them to their seats, a few interlocked couples stirred resentfully.

"It's nice here," said Doris and rubbed her cheek against his shoulder.

Jim bade her be prudent. The film was obviously near its end. At any moment the lights might appear.

His caution was justified. A caption flashed into deathless prose: *"And so when Love had vanquished Error, their footsteps strayed through a Land of Faery lit by a Light that glowed from a Woman's Heart."* A tall blonde, with a well-massaged face and an evening frock that showed her spine, came sagging down a flight of stairs long enough to lead to a bargain basement. At their foot, in an unmistak-

ably baronial hall with a suit of armour every fifty yards, waited a one hundred per cent. he-man. The woman's powdered arms went out; the man's sunburnt hands went out; and a close-up of two colossal faces with their eyes shut, apparently biting each other, crowned all.

"Ooh!" said Doris as the picture faded. "What a pity!"

Electric bulbs glowed dimly in the ceiling and the dozen couples that formed the population of the place split, amœba-like, into halves. Jim looked at Doris. She did not, he thought, look her prettiest. The application of face-cream could only partially conceal a spot on her chin, and lip-stick had been smeared over-generously. Anxious to please, she had bought and applied a scent which hung in the air of the cinema like a sand-storm in the Sahara.

He was not sorry for these disfigurements. If Clemency's happiness demanded that he should come to some definite understanding with Doris (he shirked any clearer phrase), he preferred his senses untroubled.

But even if his senses allowed him to deal dispassionately, he doubted if his heart was as forbearing. What a little thing she was! How confidently she had entrusted her happiness to him! How much love lay in that quick, sideways look!

He decided that he need not speak till the lights were lowered. Cruelty might come easier in the dark.

"I did miss you so last night," she whispered.

He could truthfully say that he had thought much of her.

She shook her head.

"I've no use for the absent friends' stunt," she announced. "I want you here with me all the time."

"What did you do yesterday?" he asked, for the lack of anything better to say.

"I went for a walk."

"With Milly?"

"Don't be funny! I wanted to think. About our week-end in the country. We'll go away again, soon, won't we?" she implored.

The extinction of the lights saved an answer. She gave a sigh of content and snuggled her shoulder against his armpit. Jim wondered how to begin. A series of pictures, euphoniously called a "topical budget," was shown on the screen. The first, inevitably, illustrated the launching of a battleship.

"You haven't kissed me," prompted Doris. "Don't you want to any more?"

She leaned towards him and Jim knew that, for all his wise resolves, he did. In the darkness the perfume was not so strong. He was aware of a certain aphrodisiac effect. Her face was like a ghost's with two shadowy holes for eyes, but her breath was warm. With an effort he restrained an impulse to kiss the pale face until his affection brought back its colour.

"Not here," he prevaricated. "Not with all these people."

"Don't make me laugh!" was her retort. "Why do you think they come?"

"The pictures," he suggested.

"The pictures!" she repeated. "Look at the screen!"

Jim obeyed and saw a personage in a frock coat inspecting a guard of honour furnished by the Girl Guides. He felt there was some excuse for Doris's scepticism.

"Perhaps you're right," he said, but the dangerous moment had passed and Doris was sitting upright in her stall, puzzled and a little hurt. There was a silence between them while the King of England shook hands with about seventy lawn tennis champions. Then Doris spoke.

"Don't you love me?" she asked and her voice tailed off in the darkness.

Jim paused. How could he answer a girl who had given him everything so short a time ago? Especially when he longed that moment to take her in his arms!

"It isn't that," he said. "It isn't that. But how can we go on, now my wife is back?"

"Most men's wives never leave them," Doris pointed out. "And yet they find a way. Why not say you're tired of me?"

"I'm not," he vowed. "It would be easier if I was. But can't you see?"

Doris did not answer at first.

"I can't," she said slowly. "We're not hurting your wife so long as she doesn't find out."

"Suppose she does?"

"I don't want you to take me about. Just come and see me at the flat. Even Milly needn't know."

Jim could not find an answer that was not brutal. He was saved by the topical budget, which, after patiently following through the rain the fortunes of the one hundred and twenty-seven starters in the West Leeds Annual Cross-country Run, flickered to an unlamented end. The lights switched on with an air of relief.

His eye was caught by a small white parcel that lay on Doris's lap. Feeling for neutral ground, he asked her what she had been buying.

"Nothing!" she answered shortly. And then, for her heart was too full for silence, "It was something I got for you."

Jim felt ashamed. He begged her to show him the parcel.

She shook her head mournfully.

"It's no good now," she stated.

"Please!"

With listless fingers she undid the paper. The artificial morocco of a cheap jeweller's case appeared. Jim pressed the spring and an ornate pair of highly-coloured sleeve-links glittered up at the ceiling. The sight of them was too much for Doris's depression.

"Ooh!" she exclaimed rapturously. She touched

the pin-points glittering in their centres. "Those are real rubies." Then anxiety retook her heart. "Do you like them?"

"They are lovely!" said Jim manfully. "I've never seen such nice ones."

The lights went down and veiled the deplorable taste of her choice without hiding the love that had prompted it.

"But, Doris," Jim protested, "they must have cost a fortune!"

She told him that she had bought the links with part of the money he had won for her at the Derby. The rest she had spent on clothes to wear in his company.

Jim's heart was touched. Doris's wages, he knew, were thirty-five shillings a week. In her pathetic hope of pleasing him she had spent as many pounds.

The task of telling Doris that to save his wife's happiness her romance must be murdered had been hard enough before. It was now impossible. Could Clemency be hurt if he gave the girl a few more hours of happiness? He believed the paradox that passion is kept alive by starvation. Fed, he told himself, a natural death might follow.

"I'm terribly grateful," he whispered. "May I have them?"

She did not answer, but her warm hand gripped his. They settled into their seats to watch the remarkable adventures of a Lady who was Loved by a Sheik.

II

A glance at his watch had revealed that the illuminated dial of the clock in the cinema was seven minutes slow. The taxi he hailed had attained a degree of senility only found in London cab ranks and in the better London clubs. The police on traffic duty gave proof of a personal grudge against him. When he reached home, he reckoned that dressed he would be twenty minutes late for dinner.

As if he had not made Clemency suspicious enough already!

There were voices in the drawing-room. As he paused with his hand on the door, he imagined that she spoke a little faster than usual. He hoped the hitch he had caused in her usually impeccable arrangements was the cause.

He opened the door and saw her look up from the far end of the room with a quick smile. He had arrived at no ordinary moment. From his schooldays he remembered some account of the rites of the Bona Dea which were celebrated exclusively by the patrician women of Rome. Cicero, he believed, had been upset by a man called Clodius who intruded on their mysteries. Jim felt no less *de trop*.

The floor was white with tissue paper that gleamed like silk and rustled with the crispness of bank-notes. Pelions of white oval hat boxes had been piled on Ossas of flat brown cubes from the dressmaker's. On every level space clustered, like survivors of a

shipwreck on a raft, hats—pull-on, travelling and picture. Over the back of every chair and sofa hung, as if exhausted with swimming, evening frocks, jumper suits, bridge coats, wedding dresses, sports costumes, opera cloaks, cocktail-party pyjamas, *negligés*—of every colour, texture, material, length and degree of diaphaneity. In the middle of the riot, slightly flushed, stood the priestesses of the cult.

"Of course, dear," Clemency was saying, "I think that buckle terribly alluring. But do you like the colour?"

Jim trod on a cardboard box.

"Gosh, Jim!" cried Gorla. "Is that you already? Is it time to dress?"

With a disingenuous smile, he supposed it was.

"How like a man," she answered, "to want a meal . . . now!"

"You must look at this jumper," Clemency urged him. "It's too enchanting!"

For five minutes Jim nodded his head and searched his vocabulary for adjectives. But all the time a memory of Doris in the Wardour Street shop flickered in his brain. It had taken one pink frock to lift poor Doris through seven heavens, and here was Gorla keeping her head over the pick of fifty. Was Gorla ready to give to Vincent as much as the shop-girl had given him?

He turned to Clemency.

"What fun you women get out of clothes!"

She thought for a moment.

"I like frocks," she said, "because they are fresh and pretty. I'm nearly as happy that Gorla should wear them. I fancy men feel the same pleasure when they look at pretty women."

But Gorla was not interested in clothes from a philosopher's point of view.

"That, my dear," she said, and shook out a pink evening dress, "is frankly hideous!"

A pang shot through Jim's heart. To his male eye, it seemed a sister to the one that had delighted Doris.

Clemency looked at it with her head a little on one side.

"It *is* rather hectic!" she decided, but added with her usual tolerance, "It might be rather sweet on somebody very young."

"Thank you, Clemency darling!" sang Gorla. "I'll keep it for my first-born!"

III

He gained his dressing-room. His luck had held. The trouble that Clemency had shown last night had vanished. But meeting your mistress in a cinema and coming back to dinner with your wife was a messy business. . . .

He picked up the stiff shirt that Onslow had laid on the bed.

Could a man cut himself in halves? One part to lead a well-ordered, light-of-day life with his wife in Westminster; the other to follow an untidy, underground adventure with Doris in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Could you bisect a life like an apple? An apple has a core that the knife transfixes. A man, too, has a core—an intimate, incommunicable way of living. Jim's core, he felt, had something to do with the life he shared with Clemency. What would happen to his standards? Standards are the index of the civilization a man or a collection of men has reached. Could they survive the division of his core?

He tied his black tie and scrutinized his features in the glass. No one would call that a weak face. And yet only a weak man would hesitate so painfully. He stuck out his chin and scowled at himself. That was more like the cave man whom Doris had admired.

The frowning reflection with the protruding jaw gave him an idea. Wasn't it time he consulted his own wants?

He brushed his thick, dark hair as he ordered them in his mind. Since he was human, they were contradictory.

He wanted Doris and the thrill she gave his body and his last snatch at the flying skirts of youth. He wanted Clemency with her sweet companionship, the memories they shared and the harmony she brought into his life. He wanted both women to be happy.

His dislikes were no more compatible. He hated growing old and unenterprising. He hated deception, mess and intrigue. He hated giving pain.

Even a one hundred per cent. he-man could not attain all his desires and avoid all his dislikes. What must he forego?

He buttoned up his waistcoat and made his entries in a sort of mental ledger. On Doris's page he wrote passion, youth, risk. He hesitated whether the last should go on the credit or the debit side. He entered it on both, and ended with a debit of deceit, mess and discomfort. To Clemency's account he put (for want of a better word) affection, permanence, all the decencies of life, and comfort of body and mind. He debited her page with the middle age and respectability that obedience to duty ("Stern Daughter of the Voice of God") breeds.

He forced himself to adopt the dispassionate view he would take of a business deal. If he sold out his Clemencies and bought Dorises, he would dispose of a gilt-edged trustee five per cent. stock and put his money in a gold mining concern with quick, but problematical and transitory, returns.

He slipped on his dinner jacket and transferred his money and his watch from the pockets of his day-clothes. His fingers touched a smooth surface of artificial leather. He stood motionless the time to count ten. Then he slipped the case into the drawer where he kept his handkerchiefs.

It is perilous for a girl to come between a man and his comfort.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE next day was Saturday and Jim would have been glad of more work to distract him than he found at the Temple. All the old arguments that had danced across his brain day and night since Clemency's return presented themselves afresh. Clemency . . . Doris . . . Jim Warlock . . . how could the three be fairly treated? What if he mistook a worm-cast for an Alp? For all he knew, Doris might not lose a night's sleep if he told her flatly that their liaison had run its course. Jim was a humble man and it was easy to believe that she had nourished no more than a caprice. Easier, because the malady of love had never been his master. The passion that he knew had laid its feverish fingers on his senses and imagination, never on every faculty.

A little before noon he evolved a formula. With a glance to see that his clerk was out of earshot, he reached for the telephone.

A voice from Madame Ducette's shop answered. He asked if he could speak to Miss Lea.

"Jim!" came the faint words over the wire. "It is Jim, isn't it?"

"I didn't recognize your voice," he told her.

"What is it? Is anything wrong?"

He answered in the negative. He wanted to see her that afternoon, that was all.

"What time? Where?"

He glanced out of the window. It was cold and grey. There would be few people in the Parks. He made a rendezvous in Kensington Gardens.

"Right-i-oh!" she called back. "It'll be lovely!"

From the look on his face as he replaced the receiver, he must have felt some doubt.

II

Rain had started before Doris arrived. The flowers in the gardens looked sodden, trees dripped, and lead-coloured sheep huddled into depressed groups. Man might be vile, Jim Warlock agreed with the hymnist, but every prospect was equally displeasing.

At last Doris appeared. Her scarlet mackintosh had turned puce in the rain and was letting through the wet in patches. She told him she had gone to the wrong gate.

"My fault," he said. "I should have been clearer."

"It doesn't matter," was her answer. "Nothing matters now I've found you."

She hesitated a moment before she hinted that they might go back to the flat and keep dry. Milly, she stated, was out.

Jim shook his head slowly. He was afraid there was no time. Doris did not answer. A sheep coughed asthmatically under a chestnut tree.

"Let's walk," he said. "Come under my umbrella."

They progressed in silence down the Flower Walk. The alley was deserted save for a Park keeper, soured by too much contact with other people's children, and a derelict, whose upturned collar and gaping boots made a poor resistance to the rain.

Jim felt the silence that left him to his thoughts unendurable.

"I'm wearing your links," he said, and showed her. "Don't they look nice?"

But Doris's depression was above rubies. She nodded absently.

"Jim!" she said, and gripped the arm that held the umbrella, shaking down drops of water collected on the spokes. "You do care for me?"

He assured her that he did. And indeed, if passion had been checked by anxiety, affection had increased a hundred times. Her white face with dark circles under the eyes and make-up disordered by the weather troubled him.

"You don't look well," he opened. "I want to send you into the country."

There is notorious comfort in a phrase, and that morning at Chambers he had hatched the formula of gradual disengagement." If their paths forked naturally, he could spare her the cruelty of a formal breach. To make the ultimate parting easier, they might even see each other occasionally for a little time.

So he had planned. He had left Doris's obstinacy out of account.

"You'll come with me?" she said at once.

He told her that he could not leave London.

"Oh, well! I don't want to go away from you. Besides, I don't get my holiday till August."

Jim offered to square Madame Ducette.

"Not a hope. She's wild with me. She says my mind isn't on my work. That was when I sold a seven guinea costume for five seventeen. I didn't care. I was thinking about you."

Jim promised that, if she would leave the shop, he would provide a better job when she came back from the seaside.

"Go alone?" she asked. "How could I?"

Milly should go too. She shook her head.

"I don't like Milly any more. She says such common things."

"Then Olive?"

She changed her ground and declared that she hated the seaside. He suggested France.

"I won't go anywhere," she broke out. "Not without you. I'd go with you to the end of the world."

By now they had reached the limit of the Gardens. Too preoccupied to care about direction, Jim led on into Hyde Park.

"I can't leave my wife!" he said.

Doris splashed through a puddle without answering. Her cheap shoes were soaked.

"If you don't love me enough to let the rest slide for a few weeks——" She did not finish the sentence.

They walked a little further on the soggy gravel without speaking.

"I'm a beast," she said. "But I love you so."

"You're limping," he said.

Her weakness had always stirred his senses. He ached again to feel his arm supporting her wet waist. How vivid that afternoon at the garden city seemed!

"My ankle," she stated. "It kept me awake."

They found a bench. Doris would have sat unheeding on the wet slats, but Jim wiped a place dry with his handkerchief. As he stooped, he noticed that lovers, to judge by the linked hearts and the carved letters of the name MAUD, had sat there before. He hoped they had been happier.

"I wish I'd never gone to the baths!" she exclaimed. "Then we wouldn't have met. Oh, Jim! You can't give me up. You can't."

Tears filled her eyes.

"We can see each other sometimes," he stammered.

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "Say you'll go on seeing me! Say you will! Even if it's only once a year. I can't do without you now."

Jim nodded. If he spoke, he was afraid he would tell her how much he wanted to keep her. Then his resolution would quite break down. Her anguish, his heart-ache, the hours of uncertainty, the wet and

cold, the good-bye he had to say to youth—so much misery had sapped his will. They sat in the rain in silence.

"We'll meet next week," he said, "and settle what to do."

She tried to smile and dabbed her eyes with a twist of handkerchief. She seemed pathetically unequal to the malignity of life. What could he do to help? A gesture of sympathy is as much as men in pain can offer each other. He reached out to take her hand.

Even that endeavour was too much for the badly-made chain of the ruby cuff-links. With a click one half of the right-hand pair shot into space. Doris's mouth puckered with dismay. Jim was tired of her, and now he had broken the gift on which she had lavished so much love and money.

He tried to comfort her. They would find the piece and he would take the ornament to be mended. He prodded in the mud under the seat with his umbrella. The hard object that he eventually dug out was a trouser button, a possible relic of the earlier idyll the seat had witnessed. He stooped and scrabbled with his fingers. He could find nothing but pebbles. Doris joined him and their damp heads bumped in the search . . .

At last Jim wiped the mud off his hands.

"I'll get another made," he promised. "No one will see the difference."

But women see differences that are hid from male eyes.

"I'd give anything if it hadn't broken," she kept saying.

The rain came on more heavily. The red mackintosh gave up the pretence of being waterproof and Jim's trousers clung round his ankles.

"You'll catch cold if we stay here. And then," he added with an attempt at a joke, "the seaside."

She clutched at his hand, his umbrella, the lapel of his coat.

"Don't go," she implored. "It may be the last time."

"It will," he said, "if we catch pneumonia."

She rose obediently.

"I couldn't bear anything to happen to you."

He passed his arm round her to take the weight off her lame foot. There was no one to see.

"Forgive," he said. "Forgive . . ."

A draggled taxi splashed along the carriage road and sent up curves of water from its wheels. Jim hailed it and bribed the driver to take Doris back to Edgware. He had promised to be in to tea.

"You'll have forgotten all about me in half an hour," Doris said sadly.

How could he ever forget the wet face that glimmered palely from the darkness of the cab?

"Oh, my darling!" he murmured.

"Kiss me. Before you go," she cried.

Even through the damp mackintosh her body felt cold. Her arms clung to his neck. Her wide mouth was pressed against his, till breathing was difficult.

The sacrifice—of her, of his love, of his youth—seemed insupportable. He wanted to lay her body on the seat of the taxi, to get in and drive her to the flat.

But his will seemed to be superseded by an automaton that the hours of hesitating thought had begotten. The automaton released itself from Doris's arms and saw her crumple back into the cab. It watched the flag of the taxi snap down with the finality of doom. It caught a glimpse through the window of a pair of lost dark eyes that made a pitiable attempt to smile. . . .

Jim pushed the automaton aside and started to run after the car. The water of the puddles splashed up to his knees. The taxi gathered speed. It gained on him. He desisted. From the middle of the road he watched the top of the scarlet hat, once worn so jauntily, until it was out of sight.

CHAPTER VII

I

A GUST of laughter met Jim in the hall. He would have hurried into the library, but Gorla ran down the stairs. He was glad that the light was bad and that she could not see his face.

"I thought you'd gone to Sussex," he muttered.

"You do sound pleased!" she retorted. "Father telephoned that he was coming to London. He's asking for you at intervals of five minutes."

"I'll wash my hands and come up," Jim was compelled to promise.

When strangers met Sir George Draper in the company of his daughters, they were apt to reflect that Lady Draper must have been a very beautiful woman. Married couples are said to grow alike in appearance and it must have been after Dorothea's death that Sir George acquired the flattened, pink snoutiness of the middle-white pigs on whom he lavished his time and thought.

"An unexpected pleasure!" lied Jim, gripping the squat hand.

"Unexpected?" snorted Sir George. "Gorla is unexpected. Engaged again. Well, I'm damned!"

Vincent kicked his betrothed on the shin.

"Damned girl always upsets my pigs!" announced

the enthusiast. "Last time her infernal aeronaut landed in my sties. Sow just farrowed. Naturally upset. Upset anyone. Ate 'em all that night."

Jim murmured sympathy. But the mourner had not finished.

"Now she wants to bring another young chap. Marjorie due to farrow to-morrow. Can't risk it. Not again, dammit."

Vincent protested that he had no sinister designs on Marjorie's *accouchement*. Sir George was running no risks.

"Never know, y'know. You've got a car, haven't you?"

It would have been less imprudent to ask Noah if he had an ark. Vincent leapt on his hobby. But Sir George had the louder voice. A neighbour's pigs had been driven to market. A motorist had run into them.

"Chap in a car. But like you. Saw him in hospital. Serve him damn well right."

"Overhead valves, of course, and a supercharger . . ." Vincent was insinuating through the monosyllables.

"Where's Clemency?" Jim was relieved to hear that she had gone to Eva Frater, who had just telephoned.

"You'll stay over the week-end?" he pressed his father-in-law.

"Stay?" shot the old man. "Where? Here? Rubbish, you're full up! Room at my club."

Jim remembered uneasily his luncheon with John Tring at the same stronghold. Suppose they met! But surely Tring's discretion would master his love of scandal. What a blessing if they would all—Gorla, Vincent and Clemency as well—sleep at their clubs! Anything to be left alone!

"You'll dine with us at least, sir?" he forced himself to say. Then an inspiration. "And come to a play?"

Easy to ring up for tickets and report that there were only four seats to be had.

"Play?" Sir George was asking. "What play? Can't stand all this foul language you hear nowadays on the stage. Can't take a young girl to the theatre. Damnable."

Gorla interposed to ask what young girls he wanted to take— "The longer the beard, the shorter the skirts," she quoted under her breath to Jim.

"What's that?" demanded her father and drew her attention to the fifth commandment.

Promising to be careful in his choice, Jim withdrew to the telephone.

II

Dinner passed off better than he had expected. Vincent had been coached on pigs and Gorla's choice of a *fiancé* was accepted by her father with reasonable gratitude. Jim led one half of the talk to the rival claims of middle-whites and Berkshires. The second

pair he entangled in an argument on the superiority of the American automobile. That left him odd man out and he had excuse to be silent. Immediately after dinner he packed the quartette into a taxi.

When the tail-lamp disappeared, he did not immediately reënter the house. The rain had stopped and the street smelt clean and fresh. It would not take five minutes to fetch the car. By nine o'clock he would be at Edgware. In the hour that lay before them, Doris and he would forget all that they had suffered.

But an hour is soon over and an hour could undo everything that he had tried at the cost of such pain to accomplish.

He stood on the doorstep and filled his lungs with the rain-washed air. The hum of traffic theatre-wards hung over the city.

He turned towards the house. Well—or ill—had better be left alone. The dolphin, his polish tarnished by the declining sun, offered no objection. The ado seemed to him exaggerated. Why should not the weaker sex and the lower class suffer? In any case, these creatures of flesh and blood lasted so short a time. Only a little longer than their emotions!

Jim shut him on the other side of the door and walked slowly to the library. He took up a book and tried to read, but the print meant nothing.

What was Doris doing at that moment? Hadn't it hurt to see her cry! Might as well beat an animal that

can't understand men and their cruelty. How pretty she was through all her pain! She might be crying alone in the dark. Or was Milly there to comfort with her philosophy of the gutter?

Pictures of their brief felicity—at the Derby, at the flat, at the little inn—arose to stab him. He saw her undressing in the low-ceilinged bedroom under the elm trees. Her skirt was in a bunch at her feet. She was standing on one leg. She wobbled and laughed at the unevenness of the floor as she pulled off a shoe with a heel far too high for the country. Her shoulder-straps had slipped and the candle-light modelled the curves of her little breasts in shadow and gold.

Well, that was finished and only a fool would use the past to crucify the present. But even a wise man can't forget so soon. . . .

What about the future? That promise to see her sometimes . . . He had been weak, but who could blame him, if he had tried to let her lightly down?

He must be prudent. He couldn't trust himself alone with her; and if they met in public, he risked discovery. Why, in God's name, had she been so obstinate about the seaside?

Jim sighed and wondered if adultery had not too good a press.

III

Sir George may be said to have enjoyed the play. The language of the characters did not take away

his appetite for his Sunday dinner. Nor were the slumbers troubled that followed his satiety.

He lay in the biggest chair in the library, his feet just touching the floor, the Sunday paper spread over his stomach and rustling at each heavy breath.

Opposite him, pleasantly somnolent and turning the pages of the *Autocar,* reclined Vincent. Their host sat at the writing-table, busy with a letter.

The silence was broken by the treble of the front door bell and the echo of the parlour-maid's steps on the marble flags of the hall. Inattentively Jim wondered who rang door bells at three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. Presently Onslow, very starched and black and white, opened the library door. Sir George moved uneasily in his sleep. She crossed the room with the noiselessness of the perfect servant and stood by Jim's elbow.

"There's a young woman wanting to see you, sir," she announced in her tones of professional discretion.

"Hey?" ejaculated Sir George. "What's that?"

But the old gentleman made ejaculations and asked questions as easily in his sleep as in his waking hours. The small red eyes did not open and the newspaper did not suspend its susurration.

"What name did she give?" asked Jim, and tried to keep his voice casual.

"She said you knew her," was the dispassionate answer, though Jim guessed that the tones would be less impersonal in the servants' hall.

"Will you show her into the dining-room?" he directed.

He bent down, pretending to add a few words to the paper before him.

Surely to God, this was not Doris! Never would she do anything so unwise! Unless she had gone mad!

"Ha! Who's that?" grunted Sir George, as Jim passed him, but relapsed at once into unconsciousness.

Jim's first emotion on opening the door of the dining-room was relief. No one but Milly would wear that shade of orange on that shade of hair. Of course, Doris had not been capable of this outrageous move.

"Well?" he asked discouragingly. Whatever Milly's mission, she must learn that she could not come to Clemency's house.

Milly's green eyes looked up balefully.

" 'Well' yourself!" she retorted.

Jim saw that the interview would not be smooth. At any moment some member of the family might come into the room.

"Has anything happened to Doris?" he asked. Suppose his words about pneumonia had come true!

"Anything happened?" the girl repeated. "A lot you care!"

Jim's anger rose. He had never known how hateful a woman could be. He forced himself to keep cool.

"Is it impossible to answer a question?" he said. "I asked you if anything was wrong with Doris?"

"You're what's wrong with Doris Lea," retorted the girl. "And you haven't asked me to sit down!"

Jim suppressed a retort that neither had he asked her to his house. He waved her to a chair. She perched herself watchfully on the edge.

"Is she ill?" he asked again.

"Not your fault she isn't!" Milly took off her cotton gloves and rolled them into a vicious ball. "In the rain, indeed!"

"Tell me about her," he said.

"When I came in last night," Milly declared, "I found that poor kid lying on her bed crying. She hadn't taken off her wet things."

Jim was silent.

"But why should you care?" asked Milly dramatically. "You've had your fun. She's only a girl in a shop. Chuck her out in the rain when you've done with her! That's what we're there for!"

A fear seemed to strike her that she might flatter herself, and she added, "If we're pretty enough."

"Is that what you came to tell me?" demanded Jim.

"I'm only beginning," she promised.

He assured her that he had no intention of listening to the rest. At any moment Clemency might hear their voices. Milly's motives might be the highest. She might have come out of loyalty and affection for her friend, but her presence in the room was perilous.

"Now you've told me what you think of me," he said, "perhaps you'll go."

"I'm very comfortable here." She looked about her. "Nice little place you've got. I've seen rooms like this in the Pictures. I don't suppose your wife has to hang about in the rain when she wants a word with you, or lie in her wet clothes on the bed. No, when the Pekinese is sick, she's only got to ring for the butler and tell him to telephone for a box at the theatre."

Jim was not in the mood for sociological discussion.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I must still ask you to go."

"Go?" she snapped. "Where to? If I could take the kid away, that might do some good. Might meet someone decent. But how can a girl on two pound a week?"

An idea seemed to strike her as her eyes darted round the room. Jim thought she looked like a lean, red vixen.

"*You* could!" she fired at him. "And you bloody well should! You'd never notice it."

"Notice what?" He did not like the ring of her voice.

"A *gentleman* would put his hand in his pocket!" explained the girl.

"You mean you want money?"

The red head nodded cunningly.

"If you were a gentleman," she repeated, "you'd be glad to pay."

"Suppose I wasn't?"

"Suppose I told your wife?"

She had given him his opportunity. He must have no scruple in using it. He walked to the door and pushed it open.

"You'll find my wife in the drawing-room. The double door on the next landing," he said blandly.

Milly stared at him. Her green eyes lost their fire.

"You mean you want me to tell her?" she stammered.

"Certainly!" He smiled easily. "That will take you a minute or two. By the time you've finished the policeman will be here."

"Policeman!" exclaimed Milly. "What policeman?"

"The one at the end of the street." Jim walked to the window and threw up the sash.

"What are you doing?" She moistened her lips with her tongue.

Without turning his head, Jim raised his hand at a signal. Milly ran to the door and shut it.

"Stop!" she begged him. "I haven't done anything wrong!"

"The magistrate won't agree. He'll call it 'attempting to extort money by means of threats.' Ordinary people say 'blackmail.' "

He raised his hand again.

"Chuck it!" she cried in a panic. "I didn't mean that. I didn't ask for myself."

Jim turned his back on the window.

"I doubt if the court would see the difference."

Her courage returned.

"You wouldn't dare!" she said. "It would be in the papers."

"The newspapers would report," he answered, "that an attempt had been made to blackmail a certain Mr. 'Z' on account of his relations with a Miss 'B' and that Miss Miles, the blackmailer, had been sentenced to five years' hard labour. That's all."

The girl picked her gloves off the table and began to unroll them.

"I'll go," she muttered.

Jim offered no obstacle. She had some difficulty with the latch on the front door. Upstairs on the landing he heard Clemency's footstep. He pushed the girl aside and threw open the door. She ducked her ugly little head under his arm. On her repellent features was written the consciousness of justice outmanœuvred.

IV

He shut the door and turned to find Clemency on the stairs. Another minute and his secret would have been discovered. He passed a hand over his eyes.

"I heard you talking," she said casually. "Who was it?"

He felt it was monstrous to meet her faith with a lie. He salved his conscience with as much of the truth as he dared.

"A girl," he said. "A hard case. But she ought not to have come here."

"P-poor old Jim," smiled Clemency. "Even on Sundays they don't leave you in peace!"

What a contemptible fraud he was and how odious the whole business had become!

In the library he found his father-in-law's slumbers profound and Vincent's curiosity unsatisfied. He appeased it with the half truth he had used on Clemency. If only he could go out of doors to clear his head. But mightn't that look suspicious? He dropped into the chair at the writing-table.

Thoughts raced across his brain. Anger, pity, agitation, relief eddied like leaves. Compassion for Doris was overlaid by irritation with her friend. He was fed up with the whole business. He had tried so hard to do the decent thing. The result was an attempt at blackmail. Suppose Milly had had the sense or the pluck to call his bluff! Imagine Clemency fixed by those hard green eyes and lashed by the bitter tongue that poured out a degraded version of his love affair!

Was the danger over? Blackmailers often have innocent beginnings. Milly, who started on this tack to help her friend, might pursue it to help herself. She had a bad little face. He would tell Clemency everything before he let a blackmailer suck his blood.

Even if the girl was not dangerous, she was disastrous. Her visit had fouled the past. She had driven out romance and let in the atmosphere of the police court. His adventure might have been folly; it was

not ugly until Milly intervened. Her touch turned beauty not only into dust, but to dirt.

Time passed and still he hesitated. Gorla put her cropped head round the door and called to Vincent. Sir George regained consciousness and toddled off to his club.

At last Jim reached for a piece of notepaper. For a little while he stared at the blank surface. He was seeing Milly's face as she skipped out of the front door, Doris's red hat through the window in the back of the cab, Clemency's hair in the light of the bedside lamp. . . .

He shook his fountain pen over the blotting paper and told himself that the kindest way was to bring everything to an end.

"My dear Doris," he wrote slowly. "It was terrible to see you go yesterday. I ran after your cab to try to stop it. But now that we have said all we have to say, I do not think there is any use in meeting again. That could only be painful to us both. I am sure that you will think a clean cut is the best. The sooner we start afresh, the less harm is done."

He paused and opened the drawer where he kept his cheque book. The sum should be large enough to give her and a friend a month in the country and leave a lump in the savings bank.

But as he wrote the date on the cheque, he hesitated. Suppose the taste for blackmail grew on Milly? Would not a large cheque be compromising? And was

it not a little brutal to send money in the very letter that brought the love affair to an end? A bundle of notes in a couple of days would be safer and less likely to hurt.

He put away the cheque book and took up his letter.

"I hope," he wrote, "that you will always count on me if you are in need of anything. I hope you will have a happy life. You are so much younger than I that you will probably have forgotten your lover long before he is able to put your loveliness out of his thoughts."

He signed his name and took the letter to the pillar box at the end of the road.

CHAPTER VIII

I

On Monday the visitors left—Sir George for Marjorie's styside, Gorla and Vincent on their round of relations.

Husband and wife met on the doorstep. She had just left a party.

"People I would walk miles to avoid, but . . ." she broke off and said she had never seen him look so tired.

"I'm all right," said Jim. "It was warm in Court."

She made no comment, though her eyes were troubled. She reminded him that they were dining with the Fraters and going on to dance at Lady Sarah Meadow's.

"Hell!" said Jim, and added to explain his irritation that to-night he did not feel like dining with Brillat-Savarin or dancing with Helen of Troy.

"It's a bore," said Clemency. "We won't stay late." She suggested that they might dress early and drive before dinner to look at the irises in the Park.

"I've s-seen nothing of you since I came back," she said.

Jim felt grateful. He guessed that she hoped the beauty of the flowers might ease the strain she saw in his face. What a relief to know that now he had

nothing to conceal and that he was free to take pleasure in her company!

"Splendid!" he said. "Let's get dressed. I want a bath."

An hour later they were driving slowly along roads that the water-carts had sprinkled. The air was heavy and the scent of burnt petrol and damp dust hung in the breathless streets. It was pleasant to reach the comparative freshness of Hyde Park.

"I suppose you couldn't take a holiday," urged Clemency. "You look as tired as a d-dog."

He told her that he felt better now. He admitted a trying week.

They turned to the arrangements for Gorla's marriage. Jim found the intimate gossip very pleasant. There was much he wanted to hear that only Clemency could tell. And their points of view agreed. He remembered Noel Frater saying that it did not matter for a husband and wife to have different religions or separate beds so long as they held the same views on Edgar Wallace and Alsatians.

"I like Vincent," Jim declared. "He's a trier. I believe she has picked a winner at last."

Clemency smiled.

"She did have a liking for the long-priced outsider," she agreed.

He drove the car to the side of the road and snapped on his hand-brake.

"We'll have to walk to the irises, won't we? What about your shoes?"

She told him she wore her thickest dancing pair. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye and saw how well-groomed and gowned she was.

"That's a new frock," he commented.

She asked for his opinion and made him feel that she had dressed to please him.

"It goes well with the cloak," he remarked.

They paused before a bed of blue hydrangeas. Jim noticed that people stopped looking at the flowers. He was proud that Clemency should excite admiration.

"Hydrangeas have hypocritical little faces," she maintained. "I suppose it comes from pretending they're born blue."

He tried to suit his answer to her mood.

"Hypocrisy is out of fashion. Our generation sets out to be worse than it is."

"Vices do get *démodés,*" she agreed. "Worse than clothes. The seven d-deadly sins are impossible. What chance has gluttony with the modern silhouette?"

"Or avarice with the Inland Revenue?" he added.

Clemency laughed. "This is the way." She guided him up a gravel path to the iris beds—enamel-bright circles set in the green. The stalks stood straight and strong, crowned by their imperial blooms, inhuman, proud, impersonal. That their flower would last a day they were indifferent; another flower would follow. Where the wind had swept the corner, the purple, gold and ruby of their petals was tattered, but the

stiff stems stood unbent. At their feet huddled the proletariat of the iris world, netted with wrinkles blue and grey, brown and fawn. Their dead blooms, twisted and untidy, clung to the live. They were indifferent, too; just getting on with their living and dying, without time for woe.

And Jim found comfort in their courage. He called Clemency's eyes to the clump of aristocrats.

"Look at the dark ones. Like silk flags dangling on their masts."

Clemency thought she liked better the young Victorian widows with violet ribbons, white muslin frocks and a gold brooch on the bosom.

"Widows just coming out of mourning," she said.

Jim pointed to an enormous bloom whose shape and colour were as elaborate and strange as a nautch girl's dress. The sharp blades of its leaf cut imagination like a sword.

Clemency nodded. "That sort of thing redeems life from any amount of platitude," she murmured.

He was grateful to her for understanding his humour. The beauty of the flowers and the love she gave helped him to throw off the incubus of impossible aspiration.

To overboard the heart's desire gives, ironically enough, as much relief as to realise it. Every pretension, every enthusiasm, every ideal that a man retains is a burden as well as an inspiration. Religions that start with the worthlessness of man catch on; for he who can with honesty write "Vermis sum" on

his tombstone has escaped with only the worm's responsibility.

And now that Jim, standing in front of the irises of Hyde Park, had found courage to abandon forever his pretensions at youth and its privileges, his discouragement lifted. He understood that he had every reason to be glad that the dangerous interlude with Doris was over and that he could come back to earth without scathe to his tried love for Clemency.

"We must go back to where we started," he murmured.

Clemency, who supposed that he referred to the car, agreed.

"We've got plenty of time," she said.

But their progress was slow, for they met the stream of couples intent on flowers, air, or flirtation. Jim's heart was warm towards his wife. He took her hand and passed it through the crook of his arm. Her sympathy sensed his quickened affection and her fingers closed on his elbow. He looked down into her face and smiled. An onlooker might have taken them for yet another couple making the voyage to Cythera by way of the Serpentine.

Perhaps that was why a girl in a scarlet waterproof with a hat to match, who had been sitting on a bench at the side of the walk, rose to her feet and limped away.

Jim did not see her, for he was looking into Clemency's eyes and he had not noticed which path his feet were treading. But when he drew opposite the

bench that now stood empty, he hesitated and dropped Clemency's arm. He knew now that he had passed that way before, for on the back of the seat were scratched two hearts and the letters of the name MAUD.

II

Events that ensued gave Jim a consecutive outline of Doris's movements on the Monday evening that he so narrowly missed meeting her with Clemency in the Park.

His letter was delivered at Edgware before she started for her day's work in Shaftesbury Avenue. She might have been wiser to ring up her employer and plead illness, for she had caught a cold and her ankle was painful. She may have been too dazed to think of any such shift. Even if she had telephoned, the issue might have been no happier, since her employer was already dissatisfied with her work.

She went about her work in the shop as if, the other girls said, she did not see what she did. She did not go out to lunch at the usual hour, for she had spent her money on clothes and on the cuff-links with the ruby centres.

One of the assistants, guessing from her face that something was wrong, made her a cup of tea on the gas ring. Our charity, it is notorious, is often more fatal than our malice. Doris in her abandonment, her eyes on the past, knocked over the cup at her elbow.

When Madame came back from her luncheon, she

was met by a white-faced, listless girl with a story of a stain on a lilac costume sent by a customer to be altered.

This was the climax of a week of negligence. What was infuriating, the idiot did not seem sorry for what she had done! She just repeated blankly, "I wasn't looking. I wasn't looking." Madame cannot be blamed for giving the girl a week's notice and orders to clean the frock in her own time.

The rest of the afternoon must have passed slowly for Doris. The future cannot have looked much gayer than the present. She may not have remembered that London might be full of lovers more perfect than Jim or employers more patient than Madame. Remembering, she might not have been comforted.

At last six struck, and she folded the damaged dress into a cardboard box, together with the materials for the work of cleaning. She walked slowly down Shaftesbury Avenue and past the Piccadilly Circus Station. She did not take out the season ticket that would carry her to Edgware but walked westwards along Piccadilly. The direction of her steps may have been determined by the quarrel that had flamed up at breakfast, when Milly imprudently disclosed the event of her visit to Westminster. The red-haired girl had flounced out of the room, crying that she would go to live with her sister. Doris may have felt that an evening alone in the flat that had seen her short happiness would be unbearable.

Jim never knew what gave her the idea of Hyde Park, but he could imagine several explanations.

Man, when he is unhappy, has an instinct, strong in the young of the species, to seek the spot where misery can be felt at its keenest. Doris might cherish an improbable hope of catching an echo of her lover's voice at the place she had last seen him. The broken link which lay in the dust under the seat may have drawn her. If she could find it, she would own something that her man had worn, something that had been a tie, however brittle, between them. Belief in magic is ineradicable and emerges into the twilight of anxiety or sorrow. Doris may have hoped that if she could discover the bit of gold that had rubbed against his wrist, with its aid she might conjure back her lover.

For one transplendent second she must have thought she had succeeded, and have enjoyed a happiness too keen for mortal heart to support. Coming towards her, over the heads of the idlers who crowded the path, suddenly appeared the face of her Jim. The charm, she must have thought, had worked. He was coming back; he would make everything right; he would never leave her again.

Then the gleam faded and darkness of the pit closed in. Jim was not alone. He had a woman by his side. She was slim, elegant, lovely. As Doris looked, her lover took the woman's hand and tucked it into the crook of his elbow.

She would have been glad to be struck blind so

that she might see no more. She could not move. She watched as if she was bound in steel wire, while the woman looked up into Jim's eyes. She saw his answering glance. She knew it well, for once he had looked so at her.

III

Long before she had limped back to the Piccadilly Circus Station of the Bakerloo Railway from which her season ticket was valid, Jim and Clemency had arrived at the house in Brook Street which the Fraters had taken for the season.

Eva, in cloth of gold that glowed in rivalry with her beautiful sunburnt skin, was standing between an ambassador and an American dramatist, agitating a cocktail shaker and trying to count if all her guests had come. Her husband stopped Clemency in the doorway.

"Clemency," he said confidentially, "tell me, do you hate old men?"

"I adore them," answered Clemency, "when they're handsome."

"There's one coming to-night who is dying to meet you. Eva has put him next to you at dinner. He's very good-looking, and very wicked."

"Jim!" Clemency called to her husband, who was talking to Archie Sinclair. "File that petition!"

Jim asked the name of the co-respodent.

"Tring," said Noel. "Lord Woolmouth's brother. An old friend of Eva's."

As he spoke the thick white mane and keen features of Dishonest John appeared in the door, half a head above the other guests.

"But I know all about Mr. Tring," said Clemency. "Jim w-went everywhere with him when I was abroad."

"Hullo, Noel! Hullo, Warlock!" The melodious voice dominated the gabble of the party. "Mrs. Warlock, I've been waiting for to-night like an urchin for a party."

Jim saw that Clemency was ready to fall under the old man's fascination. He sent up a prayer that Tring's discretion might equal his charm.

"When Eva asked me," he heard him say, "I made her read the list of guests. That's one of my rules of life. When she reached your name I stopped her. Otherwise, nothing would have induced me."

Clemency laughed and asked him if he had known Eva long.

"Long?" echoed the veteran. "I've slapped her in her bath. She wouldn't like me to tell you how long ago that was."

The subject of the insinuation came up with a glass in her hand.

"We were talking of you," said Tring.

"Then," said Eva, "I must hurry Jim away to meet the partner of his knife and fork. I know he is too nice-minded to listen."

Eva Frater had a theory of her own for making up her parties.

"It's bunk about brains," she would declare. "All a man wants next to his plate is a profile."

Jim's right-hand neighbour proved the application of this rule.

"Sole Normande," she confided as the fish was handed, "is the one thing I love better than my children. But I simply daren't——"

Jim raised his eyebrows as he dug in the sauce of prawns and muscles.

"Calories!" she explained.

He had to confess that he had not studied the science of dieting.

"Oh, but you must!" she exclaimed. "It's so important."

Every being, he learned, could compete with a certain number of calories that varied with age, sex and stature. Calories over that number turned to fat. Fat, in the years after the war, had usurped the terrors that hell once wielded.

"I had an egg at breakfast," she informed him. "That's a hundred calories straight off. If I ate the sole I'd been within ten of my total. I couldn't do the rest of dinner on ten calories!"

A *vol-au-vent* came round. She calculated the number of calories in her minute helping. That led her to the prowess of her neurologist, a tiger, it appeared, at psycho-analysis.

"The things he asks! Straight out of a French novel! Of course, you're a barrister and you're ac-

customed to impertinent questions, but I assure you I feel myself blushing under my clothes."

"But your nerves like that?" Jim presumed.

"I go to Harley Street so depressed I can hardly move. I come away ripe for anything. I feel I'm just too terribly interesting. Don't you think doctors are wonderful, Mr. Warlock?"

Jim admitted that he had the greatest respect for a doctor's opinion when it coincided with his own.

"Take champagne," he instanced. "The best medical thought supports its use. That's why I've let the butler fill my glass with this excellent Heidsieck for the third time."

IV

About the time that they reached the *glacé l' Aiglon* and the lady was celebrating the virtues of Radiant Heat and Vitamin D, Doris must have passed the terra-cotta doorway of Gresham Mansions. The feeble electric lamp was not allowed to light the lobby until dark had fallen. The stone staircase looked gloomy and uninviting. She found the flat on the top floor empty, for Milly had kept her word. The rooms were untidy from her hurried packing and the beds unmade. Doris did not care and flung herself face downwards on the mattress. Tears proverbially bring relief, and after a time she remembered that she had eaten nothing since breakfast. She struggled to the cupboard in the kitchen. She found a packet of cocoa, but the tin of condensed milk was

empty. In a paper bag there were biscuits with glossy pink sugar on their faces.

As she boiled the kettle for the cocoa, it is likely enough that she remembered an evening when Jim Warlock sat in the basket chair and his eyes never left her face—the night that had seen her single approach to the quiet domesticity with Jim which her devoted heart had coveted.

Her meal cannot have taken long for she left a part of the biscuits to furnish the next day's breakfast, in case the grocer would not give her credit. She pushed her cup to the corner of the table and untied the cardboard box she had carried home. Methodically she spread the lilac costume on tissue paper, stain uppermost, and placed beside it a flannel and a bottle containing spirits of salts. Then carefully, hoping more for freedom from thought than for success with the stain, she set to work.

V

About eleven o'clock Jim and Clemency, their minds and bodies warmed by good food, conversation and drink, thanked their hostess and collected their wraps. Jim saw from Clemency's unaltered friendliness that John Tring had not been tempted to revelation. He offered the old man a lift to Lady Sarah's.

"If I were not too old," was the answer, "I would come for the delight of a dance with Mrs. Warlock. My dear chap, what a charming wife!"

Praise from John Tring was always pleasant.

"And your little friend? What is her name? Doris, I think."

Jim did not answer for a second.

"That's finished," he said.

He fancied that John Tring looked a little thoughtful. With an almost imperceptible shrug of his upright shoulders, he began to quote Shakespeare:

> "If beauty, wit,
> High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
> Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
> To envious time . . ."

He broke off and added: "What chance had a little dressmaker's *amourette?*"

Jim was moved to remind the old man of the doctrine he had preached in the train.

"You told me," he said, "that man is a born polygamist. Polygamy doesn't work."

John Tring admitted that there were difficulties in a state of society ostensibly monogamous.

"Your generation of feminists," he stated, "puts up a poor fight against woman's will to keep what she has won by her laborious and self-denying artifices of chastity and submission."

Clemency drifted down the stairs, her cloak trailing over her arm. She asked what subject engaged the two men.

"The subject, dear lady," said John Tring, "that absorbs us from bassinet to hearse—the sex!"

VI

When Jim and Clemency arrived, Lady Sarah's house was packed from door to roof. They had to force their way up the shining mahogany staircase to gain the ball-room.

"We won't stay long in this," said Jim, "but I want a dance with you before we go."

Very softly the band sighed its way into a waltz.

"I love this old tune," said Clemency. "Shall we try?"

The floor was too crowded to let their dancing rise above a shuffle, but the rhythm swayed them; and the chatter, the bright colours, the bare backs and the mixture of scents distilled exhilaration. There was no one in the room, thought Jim, who moved or looked as well as Clemency, and the bashaw that lurks in every male exulted. No man in all that crowd had a partner with prettier arms, or a more slender, graceful body, or with just those shadows in her amber hair. He enjoyed the proprietary touch of the cool hand that rested so lightly on his shoulder.

He felt the thankfulness of one who has negotiated a slippery ledge of rock without falling into the chasm below. He congratulated himself on his luck and his judgment. The parting from poor Doris had been painful to them both, but he saw how wise it had been. Soon she would forget him.

But Jim was looking too far ahead. At that minute Doris was sitting in the flat at Edgware, screwing

up her courage to something rather difficult. His photograph was in her hand and two letters from him lay on the table beside the dress that she had tried to clean. One was the letter she had received that morning; the other was a note in which he had made an appointment ten days before.

She must have taken some time to make up her mind. At last she opened the bedroom door and found a candlestick. In a little while the photograph and the letters were reduced to a heap of black ashes. The great dark eyes reflected with a strange light the flame of the burning paper. Then her hand reached for the cleaning materials on the table.

CHAPTER IX

I

At the end of the day that followed the dinner and the dance, Jim departed from his usual custom and hailed a taxi from the rank on the Embankment. The cause of his extravagance was not laziness or hurry. He had cashed a cheque for the money he intended to send Doris and he did not think it wise to walk through the London streets carrying so considerable a sum in his pocket.

As the taxi bumped him homewards, he reviewed various versions of the letter he must write. He wanted to be kind, but he was anxious to arouse no false hope. He did not know how small the danger of raising a beat of hope or fear in Doris's heart.

He paid off the cab and found he had again forgotten his key. Again he had to wait for Onslow to open the door. As she stood aside for him to enter, she murmured something in her pleasant voice.

"A man," she mentioned, "called to see you, sir. He said he was a police detective. He asked me to say he would be back at seven."

"Detective?" repeated Jim. "What did he want?"

Onslow did not know.

"When he comes, show him into the library," were Jim's orders.

As he sat down to write the letter that was to enclose the notes to Doris, he wondered, with the vague apprehension which contact with the police begets in the most blameless, what the visit could mean.

Not the annual blackmail of the police concert, for uniformed constables in couples always came on that quest, and usually during dinner. He searched his mind for breaches of the Motor Car Act. . . .

When seven struck, he waved the red-faced man in the tight serge suit to a chair and pushed towards him a box of cigarettes.

"Not when I'm on duty," was the unpromising reply.

"Well?" said Jim indifferently. "What can I do for you?"

The detective indicated that there were one or two questions he had been instructed to ask Mr. Warlock. Jim nodded. He had no idea what was coming. The man produced a shiny black notebook and wetted an indelible pencil.

"Are you acquainted," he began, "with a young woman by the name of Doris Emily Lea?"

"Good God!" thought Jim. "What has she done? Is she in trouble with the police?"

"Of 7 Gresham Mansions, Edgware?" persisted the detective.

Suddenly Jim guessed. Their escapade at the night club had come to light. This might be awkward.

"Miss Lea?" he said. "Certainly."

"When did you see her last?" the policeman asked.

Jim decided that, until he knew the man's intention, his only course was frankness.

"On Saturday afternoon," he answered, and then demanded: "May I ask the object of your questions?"

The detective's reply was to raise a blunt forefinger.

"We're coming to that," it seemed to promise.

"Have you had any communication with her since that date?" the man asked.

Jim hesitated before he answered cautiously that he had had no word since Saturday.

"Would you be surprised to 'ear," the detective sank his voice, "would you be surprised to 'ear that the young woman is dead?"

"Dead." The word seemed to rush at him, pushing through cobwebs. Doris dead? But he'd seen her only last Saturday. And he had just sat down to write to her. She couldn't be dead.

"You say she's dead?" he repeated stupidly.

"Ar!" said the policeman who was sucking his teeth. "Suicide, it looks to me."

Doris couldn't be dead. She was so young. She had only just started. The man knew that she could not have died, and so he said "suicide." But Doris couldn't kill herself with those little, well-manicured hands . . .

"There must be some mistake," he stammered. "Why should she . . . ? What could make her . . . ?"

"That's what I'm 'ere to find out," was the policeman's answer. His rather prominent eyes were fixed on Jim. "I thought perhaps you'd 'elp us."

Jim's brain bolted from the impossibility of believing that Doris was dead to the certainty that the police suspected him. With his heart pounding, he faced the man.

"If you will tell me what has happened," his own voice seemed a very long way off, "I'll answer any questions."

The detective tapped his pencil against his front teeth, and came to the decision that there was no harm in that.

"At nine-thirty this morning the police were summoned by a young woman who gave the name of Miles to a flat in the Gresham Mansions, Edgware. She stated that she shared the flat with the deceased, but had spent the night at her sister's. On returning to fetch some clothes she had found her friend dead in the sitting-room."

He broke off and fired a question at Jim.

"You know Miss Miles?"

Jim nodded absently.

"The police surgeon was sent for." The detective began to read from his book. "After examination of the corpse, he gave it as his opinion that death had occurred about midnight. Subject to a post-mortem

examination, he diagnosed the cause of the death as poison, self-administered. A bottle that had contained hydrochloric acid, commonly called spirits of salts, was lying on the floor. The body was violently contorted and the excoriated condition of the mouth and throat agreed with the known effects of the acid."

The detective looked up from the notebook and the man from the official.

"If they knew 'ow it 'urts," he said, "they wouldn't do it."

Jim shut his eyes.

"The deceased," the official continued, "appears to have left no letter or message to throw any light on her state of mind. An 'eap of ashes in the grate indicate that the documents that might elucidate her act 'ave been burnt."

He drew his chair a little closer to Jim and looked him searchingly in the face.

"The girl Miles volunteered the following statement." He consulted his book, and read slowly: " 'If you want to know why she did it, ask Mr. James Warlock.' "

Suddenly he leaned forward in his chair.

"Well, Mr. Warlock?" he asked.

"Poor girl!" said Jim.

"That does not tell me much," persisted the detective.

Jim wondered how any one could answer for the workings of another's heart, but he did not suppose that such response would satisfy the policeman.

"What were your relations with the deceased?" the questions went on.

After a pause, Jim answered that he knew her very well.

" 'Very well,' " quoted the detective. He added significantly, "She appears to have been an attractive-looking girl."

Jim could not bear that innuendo should handle poor Doris's memory.

"She was my mistress," he said in a low voice.

The man wrote in his book.

" 'Ad a tiff?" he asked.

Jim winced.

"I wrote to her on Sunday," he said at last, "to tell her that I thought it better we should not meet."

"Ah!" exclaimed the policeman and moistened his pencil to take down Jim's admission. When he had finished, he added: "Did you send 'er any money?"

Jim shook his head. It was impossible to enter into explanations.

"I thought not," was the comment. "There was none in the flat."

He paused and read through his notes, breathing heavily through his open mouth.

"There is one other question I must ask you," he preluded. "You need not answer unless you wish. Where were you at the time that death is presumed to have taken place?"

Jim's answer was barely audible.

"I was at a dance."

The detective glanced at him before he noted the addresses and the names of people who could testify to Jim's attendance.

"That's all I need ask you now," he said, and as he put away his book: "Very unpleasant thing to 'appen to a gentleman like you."

Jim did not want his sympathy. He supposed he would have to appear at the inquest.

"Don't you worry, sir," said the policeman. "You'll get a formal summons in a day or two."

He stopped in the doorway and felt in his pocket.

"I'd almost forgotten to ask if you could identify this object." He produced a leather wallet. His stubby fingers extracted something that glittered. "It was found in the deceased's right hand."

"Yes," said Jim, and could hardly steady his voice. "That is part of a pair of links that she gave me."

II

Dead . . . Dead . . . Lead . . . Dead . . . Lead . . . for a coffin. . . .

She was dead, the bobby said. Killed herself, the bobby said. Or had he killed her? No, he hadn't. The bobby said she'd killed herself. Done it herself. A little bottle. Poison. What-d'yer-call-it acid. They wouldn't do it if they knew how it hurt. The bobby knew how it hurt. So did Jim Warlock. So did Doris Lea—now.

Jim sat at his writing-table and his hands began to twitch so that they missed each other when he

tried to make them clasp. . . . That wouldn't help. He must pull himself together. There were a lot of things he had to do, though he wouldn't let his mind think what they were, quite yet.

There was time . . . plenty of time. He must be sure first. Who was this deceased Miss Lea the man had talked about? She couldn't be his Doris? His passionate little Doris, every scrap of whose body his lips had kissed? Not the laughing, chattering Doris who told him about her Auntie Maud and her girl friend Olive? Or the girl in black and white who won the epergne at the beauty show? Or the girl in the green leather coat who had been so happy when Western Monarch won the Derby? Suppose he had written that he mustn't see her again? That didn't mean she was dead!

Dead, dead, the bob-by said. The bob-by said that she was dead. And the-colour-of-her-hat was red. Why, that was a rhyme!

III

How long had passed since the detective's visit, Jim did not know. Rhymes had stopped jingling in his head and his hands no longer twitched. He was standing at the open window and the air was warm on his cheek. He understood that Doris was dead and he knew how she had died. He picked up the letter he had started to write to her and tore it across and across, again and again. Nothing he could do had power to help or harm her. He let the torn pieces

of paper fall through his fingers to litter the carpet.

He closed his eyes and tried to remember how she had looked last time he saw her. A shutter had dropped between him and the past. He could only picture her as she was at that moment. Her limbs, naked under a sheet in the mortuary, twisted and stiff. Her face grinning with the grimace of an agonising death. Her lips blistered and swollen. No lover to kiss them. No friend to close her staring eyes.

And it was he who had brought her to this. If she had never met him, or if he had set a check on his desire, or even if his last letter had been a little kinder, she would be alive, laughing with some young clerk at a *palais dé danse*.

What right had he to bring his easy love into her life? Her simplicity could only recognise one sort of love—the deathless, changeless passion of the novelist. When his affection failed to reach that pitch, her world fell to pieces and she was in a hurry to leave it.

His class was protected against that sort of shock by an armour of flippancy, doubt and experience. Doris could only offer her soft, unprotected breast. The steel he wore had bruised her body to death. Wasn't there a fable about water-pots floating together downstream, the iron jostling the earthenware and grinding its brittleness to fragments?

If only he had seen the danger in time! Fragility was written in her delicate, back-curving fingers, her

little weak wrist, her big sad eyes, her mouth so ready to droop—all that had attracted him so fatally. However sensitively she shrank from contact with fact, small tragedies would always have obscured the sun—her weak angle would "go," her "boy" would forget the chocolates, her friend Milly would turn out "common." In the gilt cage of make-believe, she could hop to and fro like a bird. Let her escape, and reality would send her fluttering to earth with a broken wing.

Why hadn't he left her alone?

IV

From the room above came the pleasant tinkle of a piano. He knew that tune. Where had he heard it? His numb brain jazzed to the music. Chattering women with bare backs. Scents and the smell of warm bodies. The moan of a saxophone. Somebody's hand on his shoulder . . .

He fixed the tune. The party last night. He was dancing to it while Doris was . . . Never mind that. And Clemency's hand was on his shoulder. Never mind that. First a waltz and then a fox-trot. That's how he knew the tune . . .

His mind took a jump. Clemency. That was the thought he had tried to dodge ever since the policeman had told him that Doris was dead. He had lingered in the torture of realising her death. He had let his brain jingle out rhymes. He had analysed Doris's actions. He had pretended he wanted to rec-

ognise a tune. All to put off thinking of what he had done to Clemency and what he had to do. . . .

He let the thought soak to the surface now, and it burned like blazing petrol. He fancied the fools who pointed guns in play and shot their friends by accident through the heart must feel like this.

Clemency knew nothing yet. She was sitting at her piano. Her hand would be turning the page of the music with that little hesitation he knew so well. Her grey eyes would be serious with concentration on the new tune. . . .

And he had to go up the stairs and open the drawing-room door and walk to the piano and tell her that he had a mistress whose suicide all their friends, all England would read in the newspapers to-morrow.

When she came back from Aix, she wouldn't listen to the suspicions his bearing had roused. With the next few minutes, he must smash that faith to dust. He must not even allow her time to hear the truth by degrees—time to grow accustomed to the idea of what a husband can do. At any moment the police might call him to Scotland Yard, or submit her to examination on his movements. Unless his own lips told her the truth at once, what mine might not be sprung under her unsuspecting feet?

What remnant would his confession leave of their marriage? Clemency loved him now, and out of her love she might desire to forgive the wrong he did her. But could pride, sense of possession, fastidious-

ness let her ever for an hour forget? Suppose she divorced him. . . .

He mustn't think of that. He must get on with his job.

He turned away from the open window and walked across the stifling room. Above his head he could hear Clemency singing in a low voice the refrain of the song. Were these his feet that clumped across the room and his ears that caught that tune? Had he not left his real self sitting in the arm-chair he occupied when the policeman refused the cigarette? That was the last he had seen of Jim Warlock. Jim Warlock, who was a successful young barrister with Chambers in Paper Buildings, and a house in Westminster, and a club in St. James's and a wife called Clemency. Some other man was walking upstairs with weight-clubbed feet . . . hundreds of stairs . . . some other chap who was in a mess with the police about a suicide, in a mess with his wife about a mistress. . . .

V

He opened the drawing-room door. The pale scent of lupins met him. The blinds were drawn to protect the cretonnes from the western sun, but the light colours of the room—lemon and rose and gold—were as bright to him as they would be to the eyes of a dying man. Clemency glanced up from her music and went on singing the refrain of the foxtrot in her soft alto:

"An' if ma sweetie
Won' come to meet me . . ."

He stood motionless in the curve of the piano. Thank God, she at least was real. Cool and gracious, as she always was. He drank in every detail of her face—the delicious curve of her cheek, the fine modelling of her throat, the little line that the years had brought to the corner of her mouth. In a world of hideous shadows, Clemency was real.

"What are you staring at?" she asked without looking up. "Have I put on too much powder?"

As the blind moved, a spot of yellow light strayed over her arm.

"Listen, J-Jim, isn't this amusing?"

She laughed. Her laugh, the music, the scent of the flowers, the colours were frozen in the air, crystallised into a bright little filigree that he had to smash.

"Clemency . . ." he began.

His voice startled her. Her fingers slipped and the piano shut with a little bang.

"What is it, Jim?" He gauged the shock he had given from her note of fear.

"I've got to tell you," he said slowly. "I've let you down."

"You?"

The incredulity in her voice carried its own pang.

"Badly."

She jumped at hope.

"You've lost money? Gambled? I felt you had. Oh, Jim, what does that matter?"

"It isn't that. A woman."

Clemency looked down at the hands that clasped and unclasped on her lap. For a full minute neither husband nor wife spoke. When at last she lifted her head, Jim stared into the eyes of a stranger.

"Who is she?" she asked in a dull voice. "Is it anyone I know."

Jim shook his head.

"It was nice of you not to choose one of my friends," she said.

He was silent. He was glad for her to hurt him.

"Who is it?" she repeated.

"A girl called Doris Lea, a girl in a shop."

"A slut!" The cry was wrung from her.

She pushed back the music stool and rose to her feet. Her eyes looked straight in front of her.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked. "Why couldn't you keep it to yourself a little longer?"

"Clemency, I had to tell you! The police have been here. She's killed herself."

She stared at him. There was wonder and pain in her pace, but no pity.

"You do things thoroughly, Jim, when you start!"

He knew that if he had left Jim Warlock in the leather chair in the library, he had lost Clemency too. Jim lay downstairs like a sloughed skin, and Clemency had changed into a crystal picture, a corpse preserved in a crevasse. She, her laugh, the tinkling

music, the spot of light were caught and frozen; visible, but forever unapproachable.

She was walking away from him to the door.

"Clemency!" he cried.

There was no answer and he heard the door shut. He raised his eyes in the despairing hope that she had come back to him. The room was empty. He sat down on the music stool.

"Oh, Clemency!" he said aloud. "I'm so sorry!"

VI

He had his dinner alone and forced himself to eat that the kitchen might suspect nothing.

Onslow brought him the evening paper and unwarily, to cheat thought, he opened it. The first paragraph he saw was headed:

GIRL'S SUICIDE IN A LONDON FLAT.

He folded the paper and laid it by his plate.

When the interminable courses—there were three if the sweet was counted—had been served, he put on his hat and went into the streets. At the end of the road, a young man was trying to slip his arm round a girl's waist. As Jim came near she nudged him and told him to "behave."

"Hell take this lovemaking!" muttered Jim.

He turned into Victoria Street. A newsboy thrust a paper into his hand. He pushed it away.

"'Ere y'are," insisted the boy. "Flat suicide. Latest developments."

Jim cursed him and hurried back to the shelter of the house. Blindly he opened the door and ran upstairs. He must see Clemency. He couldn't be cut off from her like this. He must explain. Tell her he was sorry. Tell her how he loved her. He was panting when he reached her bedroom door. He knocked. There was no answer. In a moment of panic, he tried the handle. The door was locked.

"Clemency! Answer me!" he called.

From very far away her voice replied. Thank God for that!

"Don't come in, Jim," it said. "I'm trying to sleep."

He knew this could not be true.

"Please!" he begged.

"Not now," was all she would say.

He wandered downstairs and through the first door that was open. He found himself in the drawing room, staring at the Dresden china group on the mantelpiece.

He addressed the piping shepherd with the girl on either arm.

"Art is easier than life, my lad!" he said bitterly.

CHAPTER X

I

THE next day Jim did not go to Chambers. He had not slept, but even if the thought of his work had been endurable, he felt his presence at the Temple would embarrass anyone he might meet.

Clemency must be out. Her bedroom door was standing open and there was no sign or sound of her in any room of the house.

An intolerable thought shot across his mind that she had packed during the night and was already far away. But would he not have heard the rustle of paper through the door that joined their rooms? Besides, whatever his guilt, Clemency would not go without a word.

Reluctantly, he compelled himself to open the newspapers. The *Times* recorded the suicide without detail or comment. A less reticent sheet, baronially owned, published a description of Doris and of the scene of the tragedy, with a hint that the name of a well-known barrister would be mentioned at the inquest. The picture paper Clemency took gave an unrecognisable portrait of Doris over the sub-title: "BEAUTY QUEEN'S TRAGEDY."

He sat down to compose a letter. His brother in Shropshire had a right to be warned before the report of the inquest appeared.

The letter was not easy to write. Twelve o'clock struck and still Clemency was out.

At half-past somebody rang. From where he sat, Jim commanded a view of the doorstep. It was occupied by a uniformed policeman.

While Jim was wondering what fresh ordeal he had to face, Onslow's cap appeared. The constable handed her a long buff envelope and his chin-strap waggled as he talked. Then, with a nod, he turned on his regulation heel. Jim guessed that the summons to attend the inquest had come.

The folded paper was still in his hand when Clemency's key turned in the lock. Thank God, she had come back! He looked up anxiously to guess her thoughts from her face. But the brim of a small black hat was low over her eyes. The door swung open and hid her.

He listened to her steps as they crossed the hall. They came closer, passed his door without slackening, and died out of hearing on the carpet of the staircase.

He rose from his chair, desperate to follow and have speech with her. He had reached the door before he reflected that if she did not want him, he had no right to pester. Perhaps, he hoped humbly, he might see her at luncheon.

II

His hope was gratified. When the gong sounded, he found Clemency seated at her end of the table. He half-moved to salute the cheek he had kissed every morning for nine years. She sat motionless. He took the seat beside her. He remembered that the last luncheon they had eaten alone together had been on the anniversary of their wedding. Onslow handed an egg dish.

"I heard from Gorla this morning," Clemency remarked for her benefit.

There, thought Jim, was another whose happiness he would spoil. Into what sort of family would Vincent think he was marrying? It was ironic to remember that Gorla had always been regarded as the foolish virgin, the risk of whose lamp no insurance company would accept. Aloud, he asked what news she gave.

"Vincent's aunt had a garden party to show her to the neighbours. What she calls 'Local pest in large quantities.' "

Until Onslow finally left the room, they discussed the racing at Ascot and the reversal of the Epsom form.

"Jim," said Clemency at last, "I was horrid to you last night. You must try to forgive me."

Jim grasped at what might be a straw.

"Forgive *you!*" he exclaimed. "My darling . . ."

He reached out to touch her fingers. She drew back her hand as if a stranger had attempted a familiarity.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "Not that!"

He stopped and blinked as if she had dashed her glass in his face. She saw and her voice was softer. Her eyes looked at a point a hundred miles away.

"Don't you see, Jim, we can't go back to where we were before . . ." Her voice slipped a tone—"Before you told me."

Jim felt as if his bones had liquified.

"Can't we try?" he pleaded.

"We can't . . . by trying," she said sadly. "The more I try, the farther away you float. . . ."

"But you said——" he stammered.

"I said I was sorry I hit out at you last night. I suppose any animal bites when it's hurt. But I oughtn't to, because I've been so fond of you."

"Have been?" asked Jim in a low tone.

"Perhaps I am still. I don't know yet. I don't know anything. But I am terribly sorry for you." She paused before she added, "And for her."

Jim said she was generous. She shook her head.

"I hated her at first," she cried. "All last night. I was glad she was dead. I hoped she was in hell. Then I began to wonder about her. What she was like to take you from me. What you saw in her. It was torture to imagine and not to know. So this morning . . . I went to look at her."

"Clemency!" Jim exclaimed.

"Yes, at the mortuary. The police t-told me where to go. I said I was a relation. So I am nearly, aren't I, Jim?"

She broke off, twisting her hands.

"I'm sorry, Jim. I oughtn't to have said that."

Jim stirred his coffee mechanically. Nothing could add to his pain.

"They showed her to me," she said after a pause. "I couldn't hate her any more. Poor little thing. Poor little thing."

Jim's eyes were moist. But he felt he must explain them to Clemency.

"I'm desperately sorry and bitterly ashamed that she should kill herself, but I promise you that I——"

"Does love mean nothing to a man?" Clemency interrupted. "She worshipped you . . ."

"I only meant," said Jim, "that I'm sorry because she suffered so. Not because I've lost her."

Clemency stared as if she had never seen him before.

"And for a girl you don't mind losing, you throw away all we have shared all these years. Or perhaps you didn't share it?"

He saw she was trembling. Her whole body shook. In the war he had seen men shake like that, after their wounds had been dressed.

"A man doesn't think . . ." he began.

She nodded her head sadly.

"We aren't even worth thought."

He gave it up and silence fell between them. The roar of the traffic seemed very loud that day.

"The inquest is fixed for to-morrow," he remarked at last.

"Do you want me to come?" she asked.

He stared at her.

"Come to the inquest?"

"I will, if I'm any good," she declared. "To show people I back you."

He was amazed at her courage. He told her he hoped she would go out of London at once until the scandal had died down.

"Where to?" she asked indifferently.

"To your father," he suggested. "He ought to be told. Or shall I write?"

She appeared to be deep in thought.

"I'll go," she said at last, and added as if speaking to herself, "I wonder if I will be able to come back?"

"Don't say that!" he pleaded. "Don't you think you're exaggerating a little what I've done? I've been a fool, disloyal—but, Clemency, I swear I've loved you all the time."

She stroked the crumbs by her plate into a little heap before she spoke.

"Did you think of me when you were kissing Doris?"

He did not answer.

"If you did," she insisted, "and if you loved me as

you say, how could you go on? If you forgot me, your love does not amount to much!"

"I think," said Jim humbly, "that a man is too different for a woman to understand, when he does rotten things. Couldn't you . . . just forgive?"

"Oh, if only I could!" cried Clemency. "If only I could!"

She stared at Jim as if she were seeing him for the first time.

"But whom am I to forgive?" she asked. "The man I married, the man I loved, wasn't a rotter. He wasn't. . . . any of the things you are. He was straight and honourable and kind."

Her voice was so low that Jim could hardly hear what she said.

"Where's he gone?" she asked without hope of an answer. "You want me to forgive you? But don't you see, I've lost Jim and I go on grieving for him. There's a new man in my house, in my bed. It's driving me crazy!"

And Clemency laid her smooth head on the polished wood of the dining-room table and shook it with her sobs.

CHAPTER XI

I

AUNTIE MAUD in her "blacks" was filling the witness box. Its yellow varnish seemed to grow sticky with the heat that her bulk engendered. The room smelt of varnish like a board school or a chapel, with an odour of the hot dye of police uniforms added. Without their helmets, the policemen who walked at ease in and out of the court, looked unfamiliar and indelicate. As if a bishop was discovered in his vest. Two rows of benches like pews accommodated the sweating rumps of the jury. In his seat in front of them, Jim breathed the exhalation of a bald Jew with carious teeth.

The coroner—the usual official was ill and this was a deputy—pumped his Adam's apple up and down his skinny throat.

"You have seen the deceased?" he asked. "And recognise her?"

The fat woman in the witness box gave a dry sniff that echoed through the silent court. With her black gloved hand she raised a new, crackling handkerchief to her eyes.

"She was 'orribly altered," she wheezed.

"But you have no doubt that it was your niece?"

"My sister Carrie's only child," confirmed Aunt Maud. "As good a girl as stepped. Them as brought her to this ought to be punished."

She rolled a prominent blue eye at Jim.

"When did you last see the deceased alive?"

"A month ago on Friday. That was the day that Emmeline broke the bacon-dish."

"Was she in good spirits?"

"As 'appy as the day is long. She was always a one for larks, was Dorrie. I remember her saying to me, 'Auntie Maud,' she said . . ."

"Your niece used to live with you?"

"Till a year ago. She was always a good girl, was Dorrie. As good as gold, but you know what girls are nowadays and she wanted her own way. Come and go as she liked, and so——"

"I understand." The coroner cut her short and wrote on the paper in front of him. Then he peered through his spectacles at the jury. "Do you gentlemen wish to ask the witness any questions?"

The foreman stood up. He was a sallow shrimp of a man with purple circles under his eyes. He probably suffered, thought Jim, from chronic constipation. His lank black hair was parted in the middle and his clothes flapped about his limbs.

"Was the gentleman," he asked, "whose name has been mentioned, responsible for your niece leaving you?"

The woman in the witness box glared inimically at Jim.

"Not as I know of," she replied grudgingly. "She never said anythink."

"But he may have been the cause?" persisted the juryman.

The coroner squinted at him through his thick lenses.

"The witness has said," he remarked, "that she does not know. Thank you, Mrs. Mott."

The woman found her umbrella and unstuck herself from the box without taking her eyes off Jim.

"One thing I should like to say," she began. "I think that the gentleman, if you call him that, who brought Dorrie to this——"

The coroner stopped her, but there was some applause from the back of the court.

"Let her tell the dirty swine what she thinks," called a voice.

Jim stared in the direction of the interruption. However sorry for Doris's relations he might be, he need not bow his head to popular abuse. For the most part the crowd looked rough and unfriendly. The only face he recognised was John Tring's. Jim thought bitterly that the old man had come to see how his counsel had worked.

Milly was the next witness. Her scarlet *béret* pierced but did not lighten the drabness of the court. Jim felt that the unspent misery of a thousand laborious inquiries into a thousand sudden and tragic deaths lingered in that sombre room. The dregs of

those finished tragedies possessed, he thought, an evil power to transmute everything they touched to ugliness. Doris, poor child, had been transformed into "the deceased," a topic for doctor and policeman. Auntie Maud, from a beaming figure in a farce, emerged an avenging harridan. The jury, in daily life a dozen kindly clerks, butchers or publicans, had been turned into a pack of ravening citizens. He himself, commonplace, well-meaning Jim Warlock, appeared as a cheap philanderer, a smirking Lothario. . . .

Only the reporters seemed unconscious of the Circean influence. At their table, in the well of the court, they whispered, sharpened pencils and laughed as if for them heart-break and *felo-de-se* were the names of race-horses or rhododendrons.

The syllables of his name, uttered with all the spite that Milly could command, brought back Jim's attention.

"You say that Mr. Warlock began to take your friend about on the day of the Derby?" asked the coroner, his pencil busy.

"That's right," Milly confirmed. "She and me went down together. He got hold of her and they gave me the slip."

"Have you any reason to suppose that there have been improper relations between them?" the official asked, and looked over his glasses.

There was a little hum of pleasure in the court. The spectators were getting their money's worth.

"Well," said Milly. "I ask you. What does a gentleman like him want with a girl like Doris?"

There was a titter of laughter and the voice at the back of the court was heard to repeat the words, "Ther dirty swine!" The coroner threatened expulsion.

"On Saturday night," he looked at his notes, "you say you found the deceased in tears?"

"Crying her eyes out, poor kid," Milly agreed. "And wet. She hadn't taken off her things."

"Did she make a statement?"

"Said she'd had the chuck."

"Did you do anything?"

"I went to see the man that gave it."

"What did he say?"

Milly paused dramatically.

"He threatened to put the police on me."

The murmurs of indignation were more general. The coroner was slower to repress them. A reporter turned round and stared into Jim's face. Jim wondered which newspaper would publish the description that he turned back to scribble.

Milly's evidence continued. She was describing her quarrel with Doris, and how she had left the flat, never again to see her friend alive.

"Did she talk of committing suicide?" asked the coroner.

"Do you think I'd have left her if she had?" snapped the indomitable Milly.

One of the jurymen, a lank elder with black

finger-nails and an egg-stained beard, rose to his feet.

"I should like to ask the witness if she knew of any other trouble her friend was in," he said heavily.

Milly's eyes shone green.

"Jim Warlock is enough trouble for one girl," she cried.

"Was she frightened of having a baby?" he persisted.

The red *béret* signified a negative.

"Girls aren't as simple as they were in your day," declared Milly, and won a bleak smile from the coroner before he suppressd the laughter.

The next witness was Doris's employer, a hook-nosed Alsatian with a stomach swathed in purple silk. She testified that the girl's work had been unsatisfactory for some time. If there had been a low affair, that would account for the negligence. On Monday she had been obliged to dismiss her for an act of gross carelessness. If she had known the facts she would have given her another chance. She looked on her girls as her daughters. But discipline had to be kept. Doris's wages had been paid in full.

She left the witness box without comment from the jury.

Heads swayed and a whisper ran through the court, like the wind in a cornfield, when Jim's name was called. He walked slowly past the rows of legs and up the steps into the box. He was trying to drain his mind of thought and his body of feeling. Just to

answer without emotion the questions that were put to him, to keep his real life a million miles away out of their reach.

As he took the oath and gave the particulars of his name, address and profession, he watched impersonally a girl among the journalists making a sketch of him for her paper.

The coroner rested his chin, long as the toe of a boot, on his bent wrist.

"You were acquainted with the deceased?" he began.

Jim nodded.

"What were your relations with her?"

Every sound in the court stopped. Outside a man was crying the summer price of coal.

"She was my mistress," said Jim distinctly.

The silence broke up into little blobs of gabble, that smeared out as the coroner put his next question.

"Was any action of yours calculated to make her take this desperate step?"

"I had told her that we could not go on meeting."

"Ah!" exclaimed the coroner and changed his position. He was now hugging his foot with the opposite hand. "How did she take your decision?"

"She seemed to be distressed," said Jim and marvelled at the impotence of words.

The man asked if the deceased had given any hint of her intention. Jim shook his head.

"Why did you leave her?" was the next question.

Jim wondered if he should refuse to answer. But

nothing could make this pain less.

"Because of my wife."

"Oh! so you are married?"

Of course, the man knew all the time. He was only waiting his chance to extract the admission. Jim nodded.

"Was the deceased aware?"

Jim might have said that he told her the first time they met. To save any shreds that were left of her good name, he contented himself with a nod.

"How old was she?"

Jim said he had never asked. The coroner looked incredulous.

"But you knew she was quite young?"

"Yes."

"And you are how old?"

"Thirty-five."

The coroner's long neck shot out like a bird's.

"You did not think that the difference of age laid a very heavy responsibility on you?"

Jim did not answer.

"Don't you think so?" persisted the coroner.

A group of youngish women sitting in one of the windows murmured approbation. They were silenced by a constable.

"Do any of the jury wish to ask this witness any questions?" demanded the coroner in a sing-song.

Sure of popular support, three jurymen sprang together to their feet. The bald Jew and the elder with the dirty beard gave way to the foreman.

"I should like to inquire," the little man screwed up his dark-rimmed eyes, "whether you are not very wealthy?"

Jim answered that he was not.

"Very comfortably off?" amended the foreman.

"Well?" said Jim.

"Don't ask me questions," snapped the other. "That's my job. Did you make any provision for Miss Lea?"

"I was making arrangements when I heard of her death," Jim explained.

"No doubt, no doubt," the foreman sneered. "The fact remains that the police found threepence in the girl's purse."

He looked round the court and sat down. His place was taken by the Jew.

"There'th another quethtion I'd like you to anther," he lisped through blackened teeth. Jim waited. "Are we to understand that you theduthed thith young girl?"

Jim's sense of loyalty would not permit the reply that he was not Doris's first lover.

"Must I answer?" he asked the coroner.

The question was disallowed, but all the credit of a seduction was given by jury and spectators to Jim.

And so the baiting went on. At the end of twenty minutes Jim's answers were mechanical. He did not hear the coroner's order to stand down till a policeman beside the box touched his arm. He did not hear the beginning of the instructions the coroner gave

the jury before he sent them to consider their verdict. The voice went on and on indefinitely. The same words came again and again. Jim's name occurred once or twice in every sentence.

". . . The deceased . . . Mr. Warlock . . . the witness . . . improper relations . . . the medical evidence . . . Mr. Warlock . . . desperate resolution . . . unfortunate circumstances . . ."

In time the phrases began to make sense.

"However strongly your indignation may have been raised by some of the answers you have heard, you must remember that you are not constituted as a court of morals. You have been empanelled to return a verdict as to the manner in which Doris Lea met her death. In view of the very straightforward testimony of Doctor Rogers, you will have little or no difficulty in deciding that point. You have then to consider the state of mind of the deceased when she took the fatal step. Here you must review the various contributory causes which worked on this unfortunate young woman's feelings. You have heard that she had quarrelled with the girl she lived with; that she had just lost her employment; that her purse was empty; that her health was bad. All these misfortunes of varying gravity may have worked on her mind. You have also heard that the married man, in whose charge she had placed her affections, had recently broken off the guilty relations between them. I think you can have little doubt that there you have the deciding factor. . . ."

When he had reached that point the coroner, it appeared to Jim, began again and repeated what he had already said.

After many years, the jury trooped out. A buzz of talk succeeded. Necks were craned. Jim sat staring at the floor. The questions that had been hurled at him rang in his ears.

A tall form seated itself by his side and a hand was laid on his shoulder.

"My dear chap!" said the bell-like voice of John Tring. "Don't take this misfortune too much to heart. Everybody in the room has done as bad. Worse, I expect. You happen to have had poor luck."

Jim attempted a smile. The old man's cynicism, he knew, was kindly meant; but kindness was more dangerous than hostility, since it might break down his fortitude.

"It's good of you to come and talk to me," he said. "Not many would."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Dishonest John. "Not talk to Badger Warlock's son! When a lot of rabble are worrying him!"

He rose to his feet and towered above his friend.

"You must come and have a bit of dinner soon," he said.

"At your club?" asked Jim in his bitterness.

For one moment John Tring was taken aback.

"I can give you a better meal at my flat," he parried.

Already the jury were marching back to their seats.

The verdict had not been hard to find. As they passed his seat most of them avoided Jim's eye. He guessed that he was to be spared nothing.

Nor, it proved, was Doris to be more leniently treated.

"*Felo-de-se,*" said the foreman in answer to the coroner's question.

"*Felo-de-se,* and the jury wish to add a rider expressing in the strongest terms their disgust at the conduct of Mr. Warlock."

II

Jim blundered out of the dingy court, down the dusty staircase and into the windy street. A gramophone disc that screamed the coroner's concluding words revolved inside his skull. Throughout the case the man had shown an enlightened and impartial judgment, and his nasal sentences hurt more than any *banderilla* that the jury had planted.

"Strongly-worded," were his final words, "as this rider may sound, I cannot withhold my entire concurrence. When a married man of thirty-five, of good education and a good station in life, entangles a young girl of an inferior class in an irregular union, quite apart from any breach of the moral law, he assumes a very grave responsibility. Mr. Warlock seems to have acted throughout with a levity as cynical as it has proved disastrous. If he had shown a little less selfishness, a little more kindness, this unfortunate young woman would be alive to-day."

Jim made an effort to stop the record that ground out those words in his brain. He looked up at the sky. Its grey was better than the dirty ceiling of the coroner's court. He sniffed the petrol-laden air. It was better than the Jew's breath. Perhaps the worst was over.

His eye fell on a newspaper bill:

BARRISTER AND DEAD DRESSMAKER

He looked away and met the scornful eyes of the loungers in the street. Some of them began to whisper. A group of bareheaded girls hissed as he passed. He looked round for a taxi. A driver jerked up his chin. His air of insolence showed that he knew what Jim had done and what the coroner had said.

The sound of booing was audible until they had driven some way from the court.

III

When he reached his library, Jim's head was dazed with pain. But for the contempt he might read on Onslow's face, he would have rung for whisky. His own room seemed unfamiliar. The succubi that peopled the nightmare unreality of the hideous court had followed him home. At any moment the coroner, with a chin like the toe of a boot, might pop out of the curtains. Couldn't he still smell the breath of the bald-headed Jew? Was that the wind, or was someone still booing him?

He would go mad if he didn't soon forget. Think about something else. Make plans for the future.

What plans? Of course, he would be disbarred. That meant he was denied the solace of work. Who would give him a job? He would have to live abroad. Like Oscar Wilde and his kind. Farm in the colonies? Clemency would hate that . . .

Hell, he wasn't used to leaving her out of his plans! Of course, she would not come with him to the colonies. The best thing she could do for herself was to divorce and forget him. . . . Poor Clemency, how she had cried at luncheon yesterday! Was it true that he might never see her again? She had said . . .

Even if she came back from Sussex, what sort of life would they share? She had told him he was a stranger—a stranger who had killed the man she had married. He could never make her happy again. The colours of their common life had been bleached. No, not bleached. He had obliterated them. Oh! what a fool he had been! What a bitter, death-bearing fool!

A child finds a live shell in the garden and carries it to the kitchen fire. . . . The whole house comes crashing about his head. Killing, maiming, ruining—all for the child to have his bit of fun.

Doris's life, Clemency's happiness. . . .

IV

He did not look up when the door opened. Onslow could do whatever it was she wanted.

"Jim!" said Clemency's low voice.

He did not raise his eyes. He did not want her to see the tears that her voice brought.

"Haven't you started?" he asked.

"I was at the station. I saw an evening paper. I couldn't leave you to face them alone."

She sat on the arm of his chair.

"Poor old Jim!" she said.

The kindness in her voice came nearer to breaking down his courage than all he had suffered.

"It was sweet of you to come back," he said. "But what's the good . . . now?"

"Don't you want me?" she asked.

"Desperately!" He shrugged his shoulders. "But what's the good? We can't bring back what I've thrown away."

Silence fell. He felt he was drawing her into his torment.

"So I think you'd better go back to the station," he continued. "It will be best . . . in the long run."

"I'm willing to take a risk," Clemency murmured.

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"I can't bear to think of you here alone, suffering, thinking of what those men said. I'm going to stay with you, Jim, if I can. If we fail again, our failure will only mean a little more pain."

"I don't want to hurt you another time," he said humbly.

"You can't hurt me so much again," she answered. "That nerve is dead. But I'd like to try once more. Would you?"

"Can you bear it?" he asked.

She bent over and with the tips of her fingers she touched his hair.

"Better than I could bear to l-lose you quite," she whispered.

CHAPTER XII

I

One night a couple of months later, Jim leaned out of the bedroom window of a hotel in Capri. With Clemency he had left England after the inquest and they had travelled Europe in the improbable hope that Nature or man could give them something that was not in their own hearts.

Sleep was impossible, and he had been glad to leave his tangled bed-clothes to look down on the narrow streets below his window as a man might gaze at the uncovered workings of an ants' nest. The white walls gleamed in the moonlight and the alleys lay in the shadow between them like black waterways. There was no light in the houses, no murmur in the streets.

Jim's unhappiness seemed to well out of the open window and to permeate the sleeping town like a mist. It enveloped the lazy peasants, the dishonest shopkeepers, the extortionate cabmen. Its waves rolled on till they reached the ambiguous crust of artists and writers whose villas whitened the hillside.

He knew that he had been given a second chance, but not the power to take it. Clemency was unfail-

ingly kind. A visit to any town or country that he might suggest was invariably what she had always desired. She ate the foods he liked and was at pains to discuss the topics that interested him. She showed gratitude for the tenderness he lavished on her.

But between them there sparkled a transparent, impenetrable sheet of ice, through which their hearts could not communicate. The sheet was growing thicker with the months.

There lay Clemency, frozen into her glacier, visible, lovely, unattainable. He did not know what she thought, what she felt; he only knew that she suffered.

He sighed and pitched through the window the cigarette he had lit. The glowing end landed on the slope far below him. Following the point of red light, his eye rested on the Cistercian monastery that dreamt in the moonlight at the foot of the hill. The building was deserted now, its cloister crumbling, its cells ruinous. Soon there would be nothing but a graceful ruin and, after perhaps another century of decay, a heap of stones. Was that the end of all beauty?

> The glories of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things . . .

Up the hill he could look towards the site of Tiberius's imperial villa, where a splendour that humbled the world is commemorated among the thyme and the myrtle by a rubbish heap of shattered

foundations and broken cisterns, topped by a gilt statue of the Virgin Mary.

His head was full of bits of poetry to-night. How did the thing go?

> Man with his burning soul
> Has but an hour of breath
> To build a ship of truth
> On which his soul may sail—
> Sail on the sea of death,
> For death takes toll
> Of beauty, courage, youth,
> Of all but truth . . .

"Of all but truth?" Even that was the song of an optimist. Truth Jim believed to be as relative as any other fiction our senses can perceive, as dependent on longitude and century and circumstance. But the words rang in his head. They seemed to give him a hint. To show him how to break through that wall between him and Clemency. What if he told her the exact, unembroidered facts of his fortnight with Doris, not sparing himself, not sparing his hearer? Would that not be more healthy than always to shirk the subject, to leave her imagination to its work of hyperbole?

He hurried along the corridor and knocked at Clemency's door.

II

"Come in!" said her low voice. She sounded wide-awake.

"I didn't wake you?" he asked.

He noticed that the moon led memories of rare metals through the meshes of her hair—pale gold, wrought copper and mysterious silver.

"It's too hot to sleep," she assured him.

"That's what I found. Clemency, I want to talk to you."

She asked him, with a note of fear in her voice, if it was necessary.

"I think so," he answered. "I want to tell you exactly what there was between Doris and me; exactly what I did and said and thought; what she was like and how everything happened."

She did not answer. He sat on a chair by the window and began his story.

"The night you want down to Sussex," he said, "I met John Tring. He took me to a studio party at Chelsea. They did me pretty well and then we played blind man's buff. The girl I caught was Doris . . ."

So the recital went on. He left out nothing, in however poor a light it showed him. He made no excuses. He glossed over nothing. For an hour he talked, and Clemency did not interrupt except to utter a low-voiced "I s-see, dear," or, "yes, go on."

At last he reached the end—the parting in the Park, Milly's visit, the fatal letter.

"I've told you everything now," he said.

For a long time neither spoke.

"I'm very glad you've told me, Jim," she breathed. "You've made everything—oh! s-so much easier."

Jim listened anxiously. He was in the grip of a reaction and desperately afraid that he had blundered.

"All these weeks," she said, "I've been wondering and picturing about you and Doris. What took you to her. What you said to her. What you called her. Everything about you two. It's been hell. Now you've told me the truth—I know you have left nothing out —and I don't mind. Not much."

"Do you think you can forget . . .?" he began.

She stopped him.

"Let me tell you what I feel, and perhaps we can bury this unhappiness," she said. "By telling me, you have taken away my doubt. You've done something else. You've made me your friend again."

He rose from his chair and walked to her bed.

"It was horrible to know that you had secrets," she explained. "After all the years when we shared everything. But now, even if we can't be lovers, you've shown me that we can be pals."

"That isn't to be despised," he said courageously.

"I think," she meditated, "that no human relationship is to be despised. That's how unhappiness comes. We expect so much. If love was really humble, it would not be hurt by the usage it is bound to suffer."

"You are bitter," he said.

"No," she said. "Humble. I don't expect too much."

She sat up in bed and caught his head against her

breast. They sat quiet for a long time. Clemency's breast was warm. Her fingers smoothed his hair with their familiar, hesitating touch.

He felt like a man who wakes up in his own room after an eternity of pain and delirium.

THE END

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